Princess Ai
The Prism of Midnight Dawn
Created by Courtney Love & Stuart "D.J. Milky" Levy
Story by Stuart "D.J. Milky" Levy Written by Christine Boylan Art by Misaho Kuritadou
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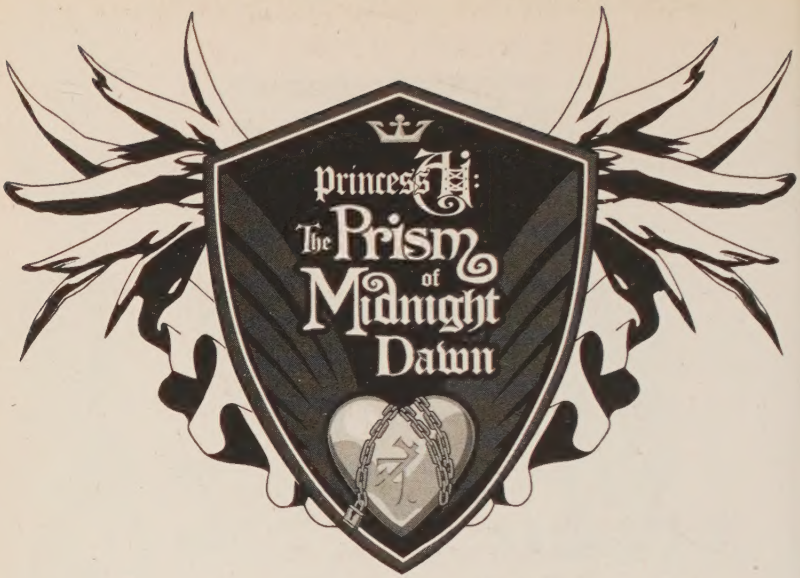

VOLUME 2

STORY BY: STUART "D.J. MILKY" LEVY
ART BY: MISAHO KUJIRADOU
WRITTEN BY: CHRISTINE BOYLAN

"PRINCESS AI" CREATED BY:
COURTNEY LOVE & STUART "D.J. MILKY" LEVY

TOKYOPOP®

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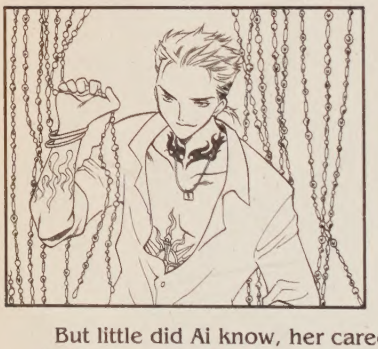
Princess Ai: Back Story★

Not long ago, a princess from Ai-Land, a world like our own, but different, awoke in Tokyo with her clothes and her memory in tatters. She knew only that she was not from Earth, that she had an important mission, and that her heart-shaped box was very important. With the help of Kent, a kind passerby, Ai pieced the memories of her old life back together while creating a new life on "the Other Side." She met the innocent Jen, and the quirky Fa'an, and gained both friendship and valuable clues to her past.



After hearing Ai sing at a club, a talent scout named Takeshi recruited her to work for the illustrious Hayabusa Talent Agency, known colloquially as "HTA." Ai chaffed at HTA's restrictions, and frequently butted heads with the brash, arrogant Takeshi. She tried to escape HTA's fortress-like apartment complex, balked at doing interviews, but quickly grew to love her fans, and she flourished as a performer, touching hearts world-wide. At first separated from Kent by her new career, eventually they were reunited as Ai went on tour and Kent joined her entourage.

But little did Ai know, her career was part of a gambit by Mister Hayabusa himself to create a new international superstar, and then kill her at the peak of her popularity in order to ensure Ai's place in music history and become the sole recipient of all her revenue and royalties. Takeshi was given orders to remove Ai when the time was right, and so his loyalty to HTA was strongly tested against his own feelings about Ai.

★See Original Trilogy, Vol. 1-3
(ask your friendly neighborhood bookseller!)

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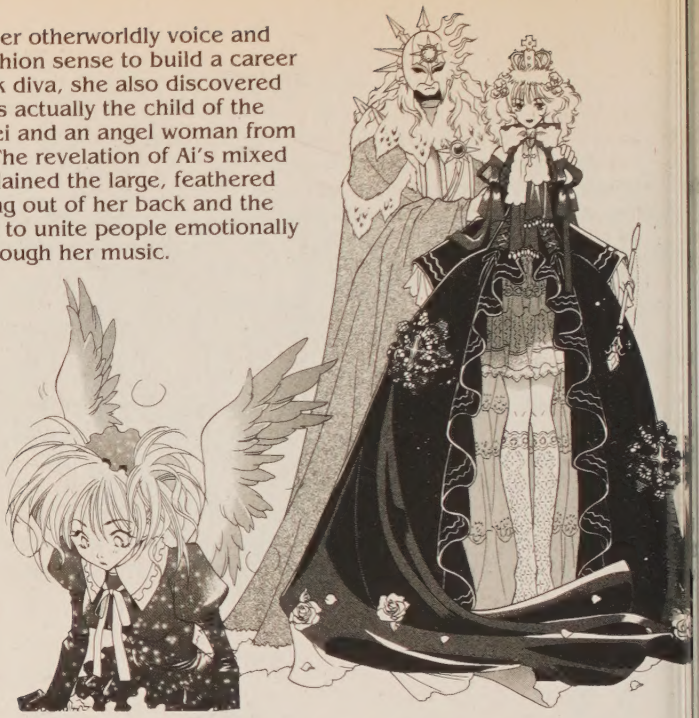
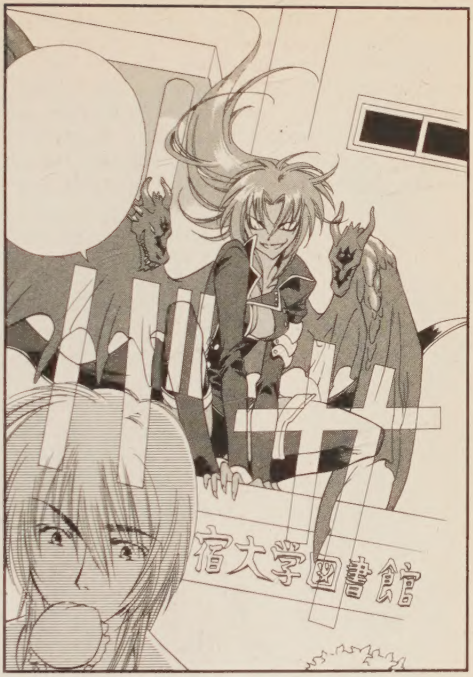
As Ai used her otherworldly voice and outrageous fashion sense to build a career as global rock diva, she also discovered that she was actually the child of the human King Sei and an angel woman from the Dougen. The revelation of Ai's mixed heritage explained the large, feathered wings growing out of her back and the power she had to unite people emotionally through her music.



In a showdown at her final concert in Osaka, Ai and Kent defended their lives and their newfound love against the Furies of Ai-Land, the company that held Ai's recording contract, and Ai's own emotional turmoil. Ultimately succeeding, Ai and the Furies returned to Ai-Land, their disappearance adding to the mountain of speculation and rumors about the star and her entourage. The Second Revolution was won, and Ai's legend grew...

Things failed to run smoothly, however, and on top of memory loss, the initial threat of homelessness, and the challenges of a career in entertainment, Ai was hotly pursued by a successive trio of winged sisters, the Furies, sent from Ai-Land by the embittered Angel second-in-command, Kaz. Kaz wanted revenge on Ai, believing she had poisoned the mind of his cousin Nora, the charismatic leader of the so-called Second Revolution. Struggling against the oppressive King Sei, the Revolution sought to free the supposedly extinct Dougen race from the tyranny of the Human population of Ai-Land, with Kaz representing a hard-line approach, and Nora advocating the possibility of the two races living in harmony.



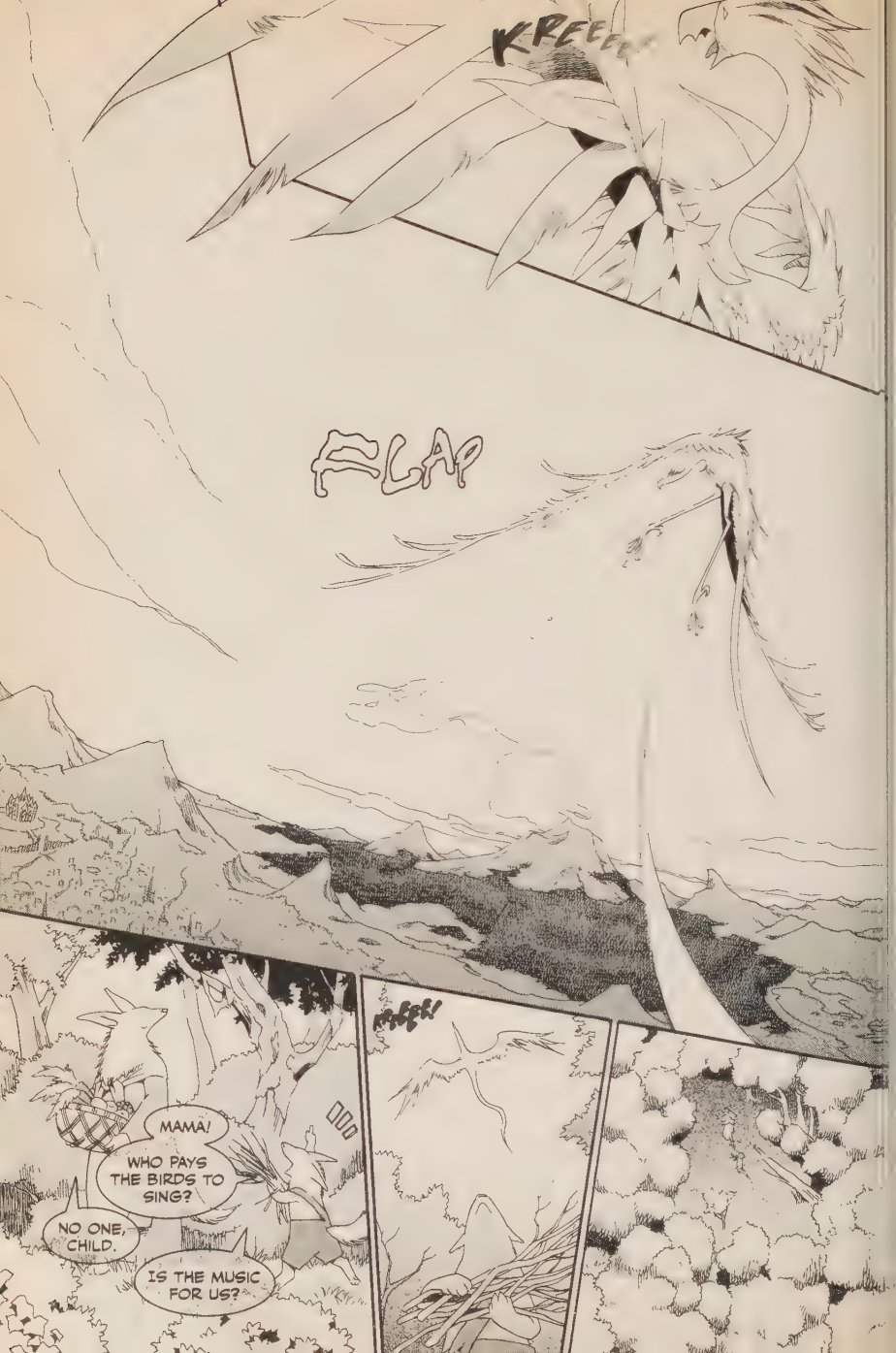
CHAPTER

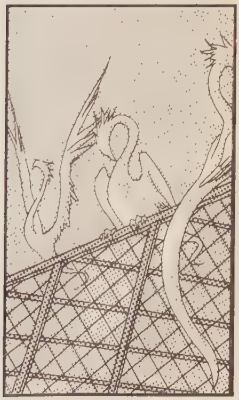
7

Tower

But victory did not lead to peace. A year as co-ruler of Ai-Land alongside her half-brother Nora left Ai increasingly frustrated by her lack of true freedom and her longing or Kent, who stayed back on the Other Side. So when the mysterious and powerful Prism of the Midnight Dawn was stolen from the Other Side, and its protector, Sir Edwin See, disappeared along with it, Ai leapt at the opportunity to return to Earth and stage a rescue and recovery attempt, in spite of Nora's reservations.

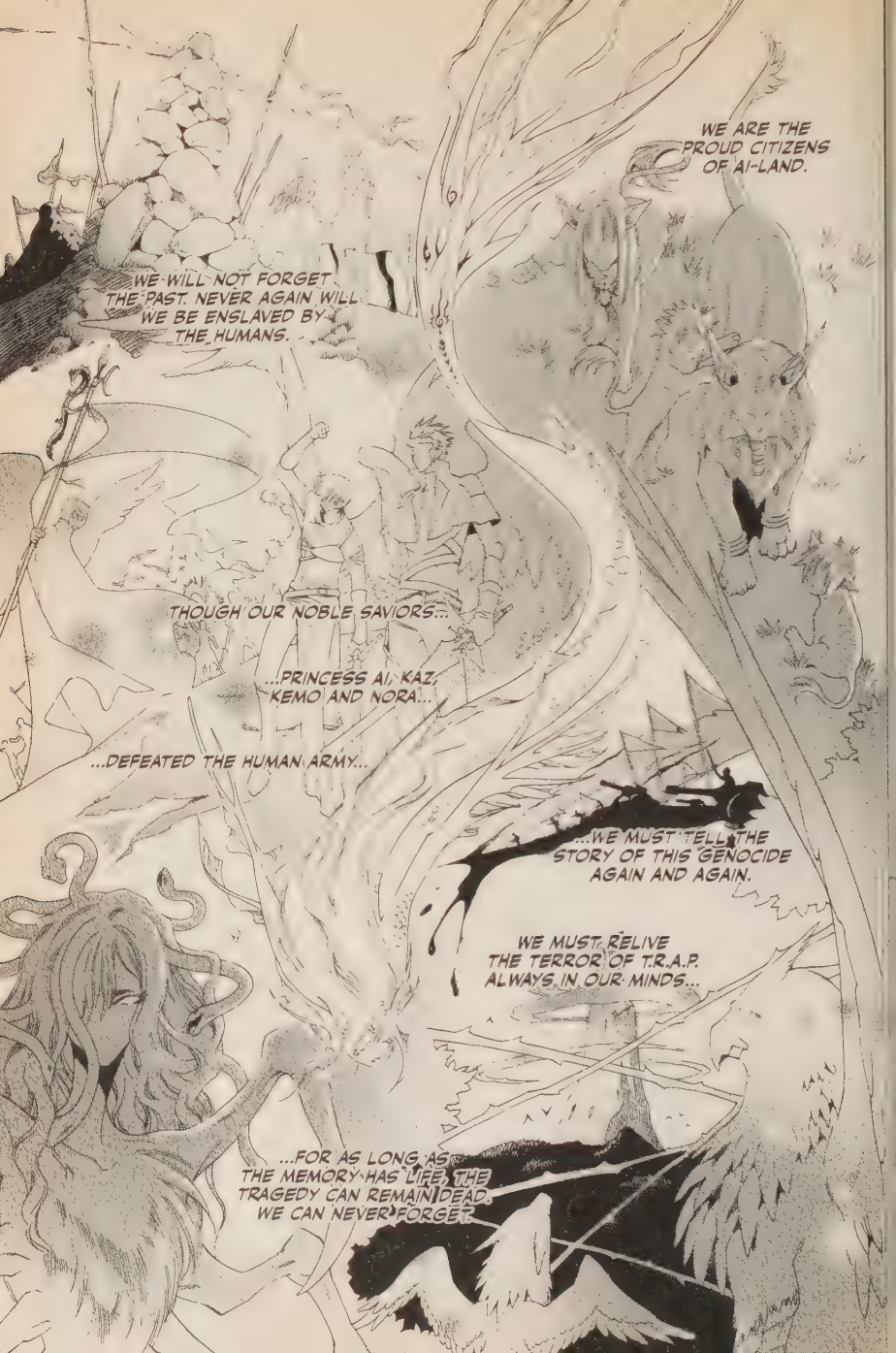
However, Ai quickly discovered that the problems of the two worlds were even more serious than she imagined. A new designer drug called tAnk had gained huge popularity in the past year, sucking Kent, now a star musician in his own right, into a spiral of addiction and despair. HTA, Ai's old talent agency, seemed to be behind the drug, until tAnk was revealed to be connected to Tenketsu, the poison blood of Angels, hinting at a darker link back to Ai-Land. But before Ai and Kent could reunite and reconcile, Ai was abducted...

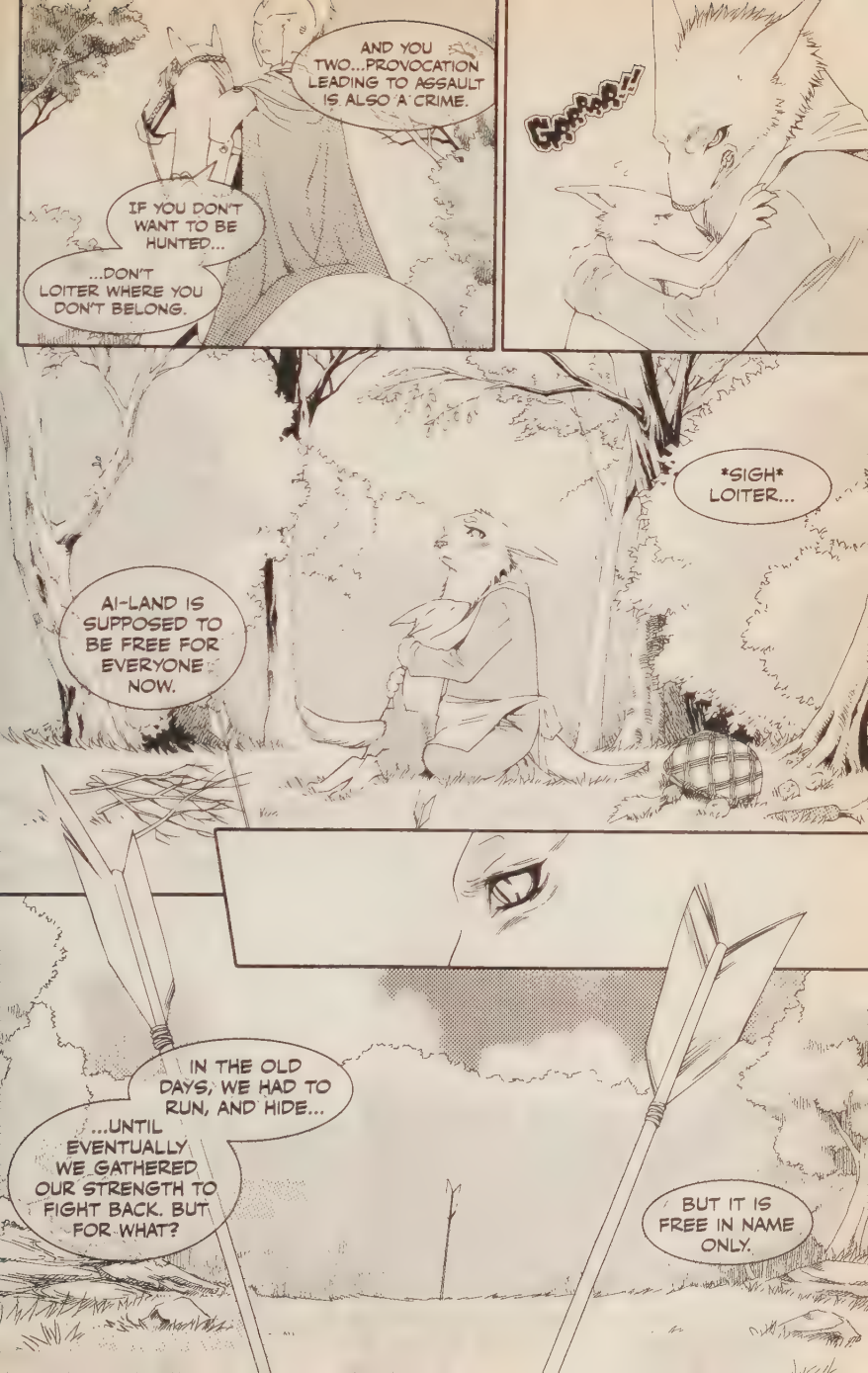

KREEE
FLAP
MAMA!
WHO PAYS THE BIRDS TO SING?
NO ONE, CHILD.
IS THE MUSIC FOR US?
PLEEK!

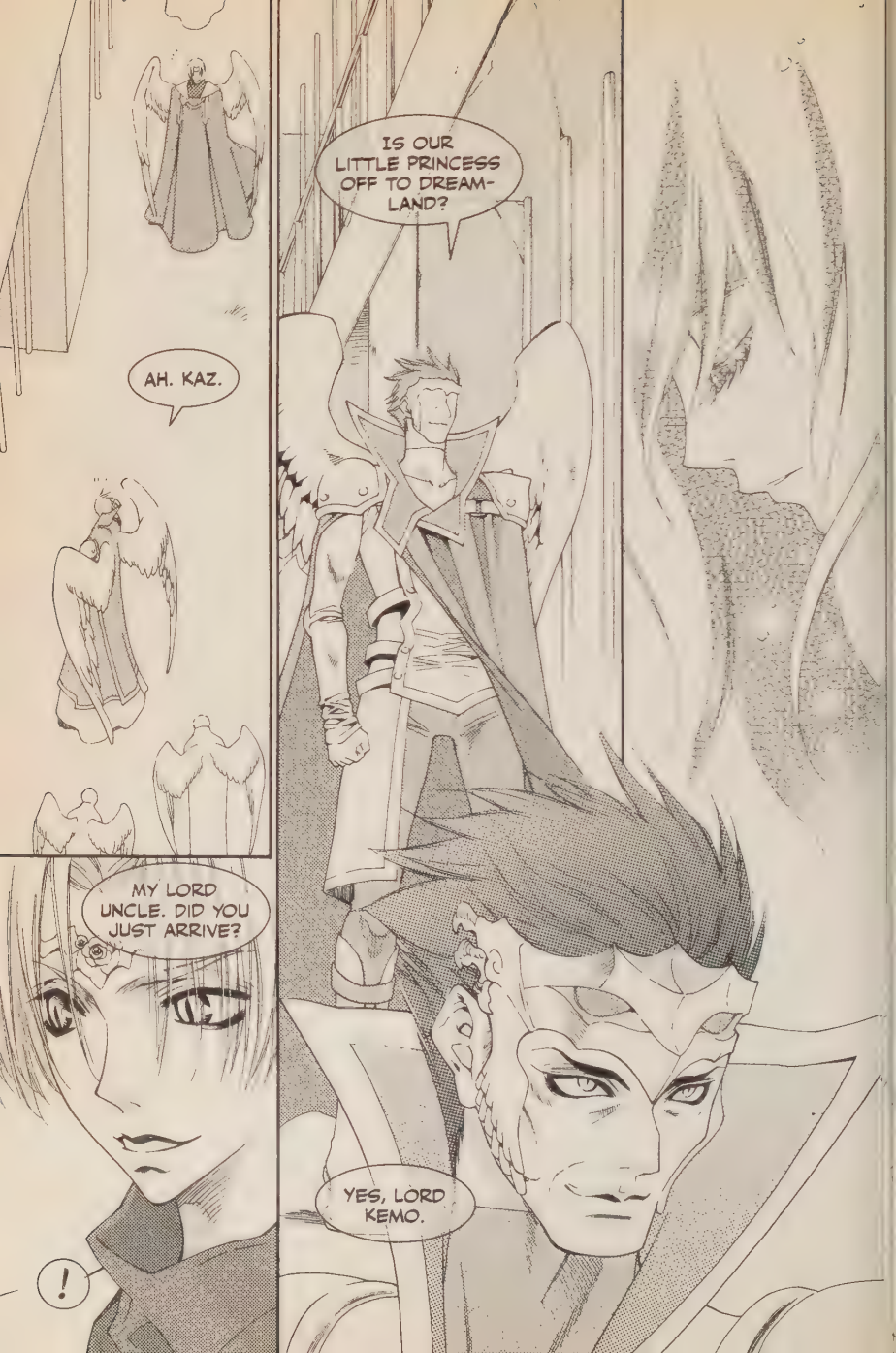


GRRRRR!!!
AW, HELL.
WHAT THE--?! DOUGEN?
UM...I'M SORRY... WE WERE TRACKING THIS BEAR, AND--
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM HERE?!
A PALACE GUARD! LET'S GO.
H-HEY! WE APOLOGIZED, DIDN'T WE?!
Creeeak
WE'RE LICENSED FOR BEAR, BUT IF YOU WANT TO ATTACK US, I'LL SHOOT. SELF-DEFENSE.
DAMN BEASTS.
Rustle
YOU'RE AWARE OF THE LAWS AGAINST HARMING DOUGEN?
YEAH, WE KNOW, SIR. ON OUR WAY.

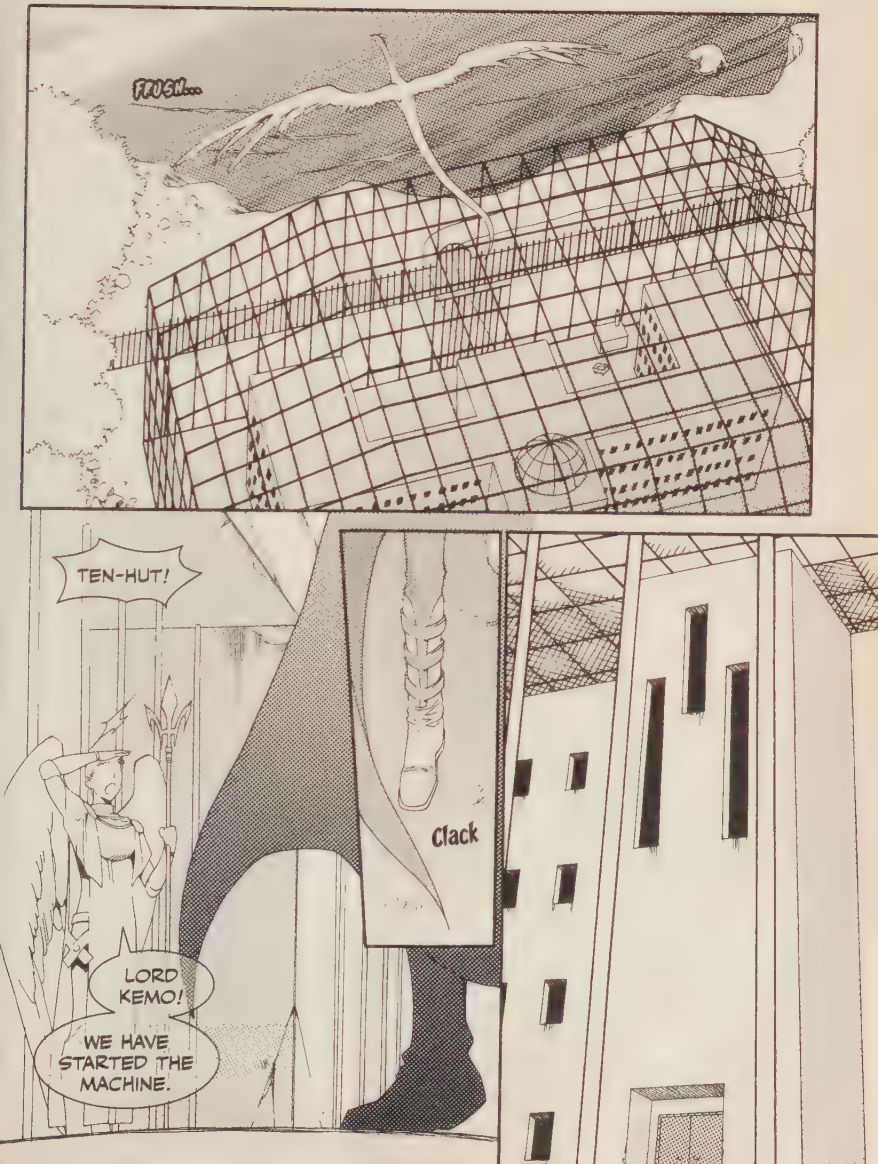
BUT THEY ARE NOT FORCED TO DO SO.
Rustle
BIRDS SING TO STAY ALIVE. JUST AS WE HUNT.
Rustle
!!
THE WORLD IS WIDER THAN DARK CAVES, CHILD.
ARE THEY SINGING AT THE SKY? WHEN WE WERE HIDING, I MISSED THE SKY, MAMA.
MY BABY!
Rustle
DID I GET 'IM?
MAMA!
Rustle

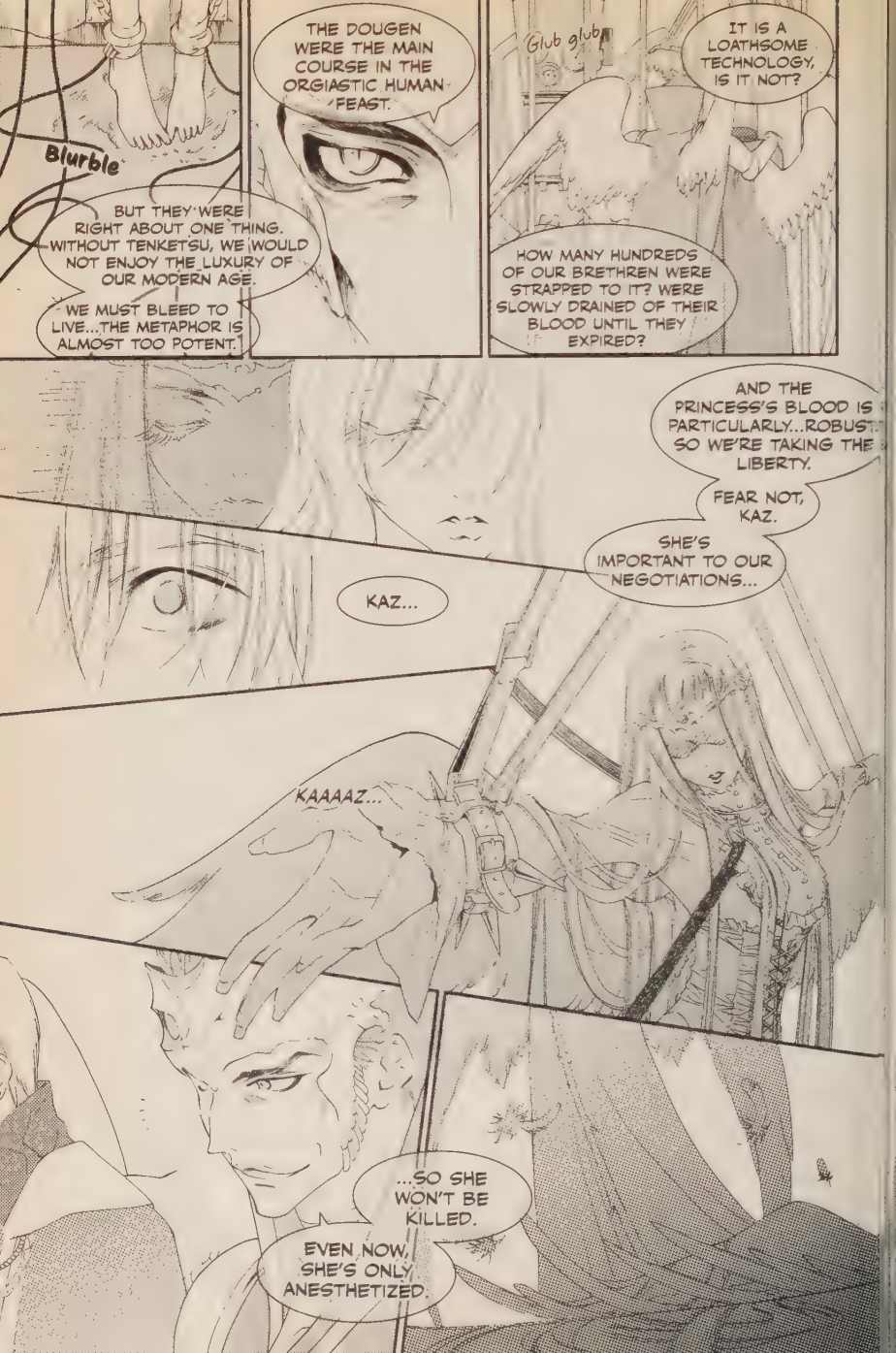

WE ARE THE PROUD CITIZENS OF AI-LAND.
WE WILL NOT FORGET THE PAST. NEVER AGAIN WILL WE BE ENSLAVED BY THE HUMANS.
THOUGH OUR NOBLE SAVIORS...
...PRINCESS AI, KAZ, KEMO AND NORA...
...DEFEATED THE HUMAN ARMY...
...WE MUST TELL THE STORY OF THIS GENOCIDE AGAIN AND AGAIN.
WE MUST RELIVE THE TERROR OF T.R.A.P. ALWAYS IN OUR MINDS...
...FOR AS LONG AS THE MEMORY HAS LIFE, THE TRAGEDY CAN REMAIN DEAD. WE CAN NEVER FORGET.


AND YOU TWO...PROVOCATION LEADING TO ASSAULT IS ALSO A CRIME.
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE HUNTED...
...DON'T LOITER WHERE YOU DON'T BELONG.
GRRRR!!
SIGH LOITER...
AI-LAND IS SUPPOSED TO BE FREE FOR EVERYONE NOW.
IN THE OLD DAYS, WE HAD TO RUN, AND HIDE...
...UNTIL EVENTUALLY WE GATHERED OUR STRENGTH TO FIGHT BACK. BUT FOR WHAT?
BUT IT IS FREE IN NAME ONLY.

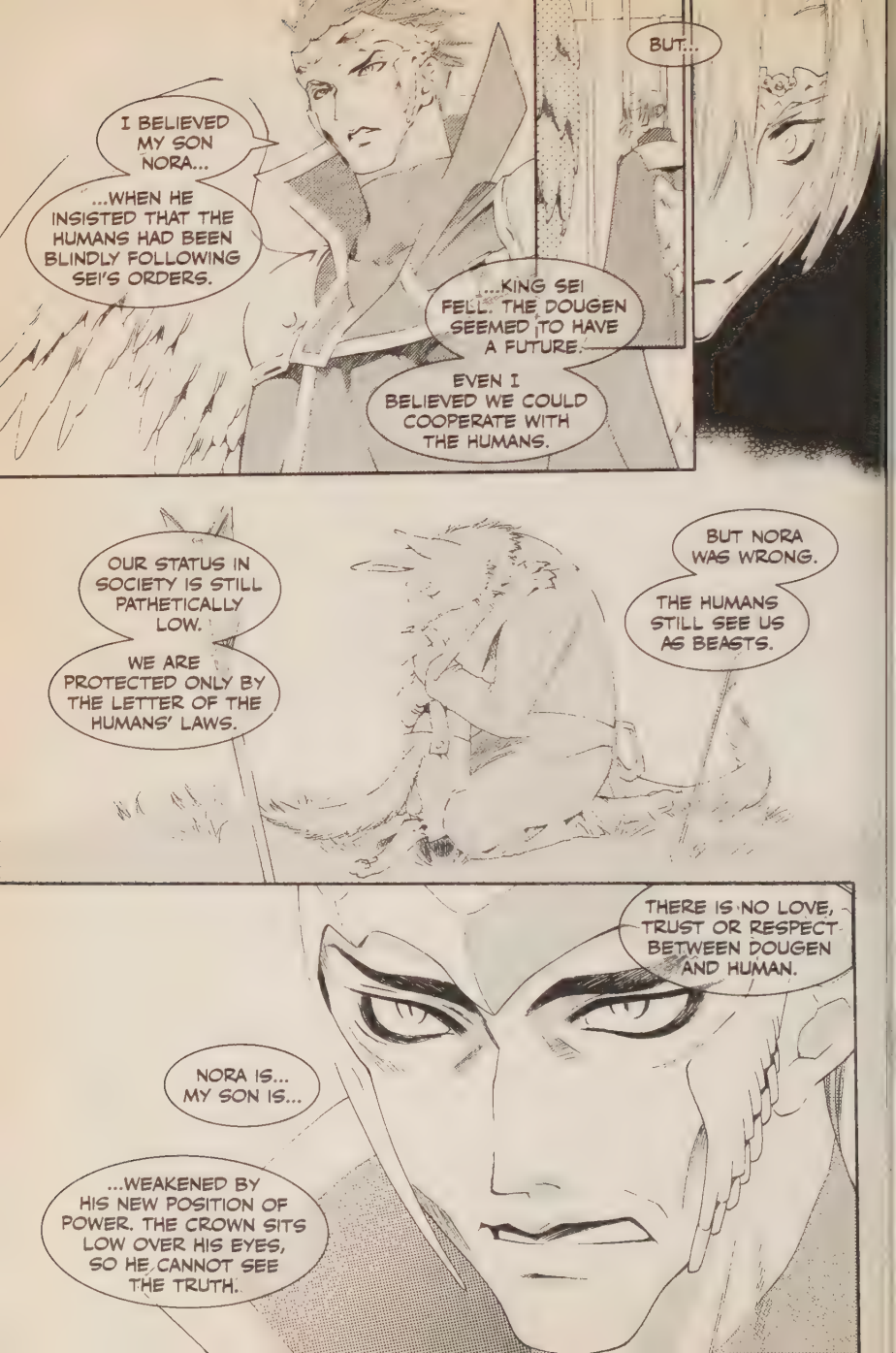

AH. KAZ.
IS OUR LITTLE PRINCESS OFF TO DREAM-LAND?
MY LORD UNCLE. DID YOU JUST ARRIVE?
!
YES, LORD KEMO.

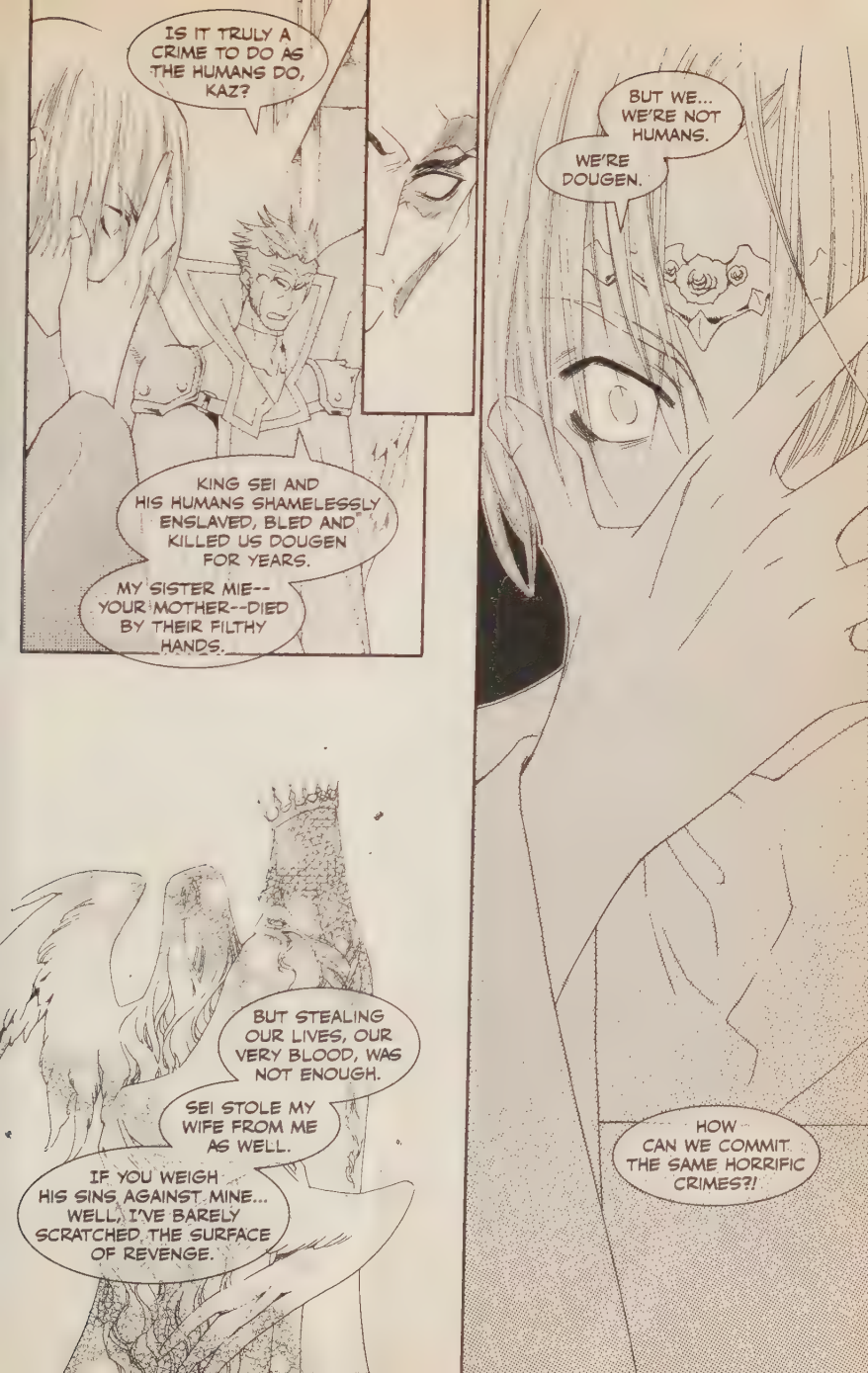
ONLY BY REMEMBERING CAN WE MAINTAIN THIS FRAGILE PEACE.

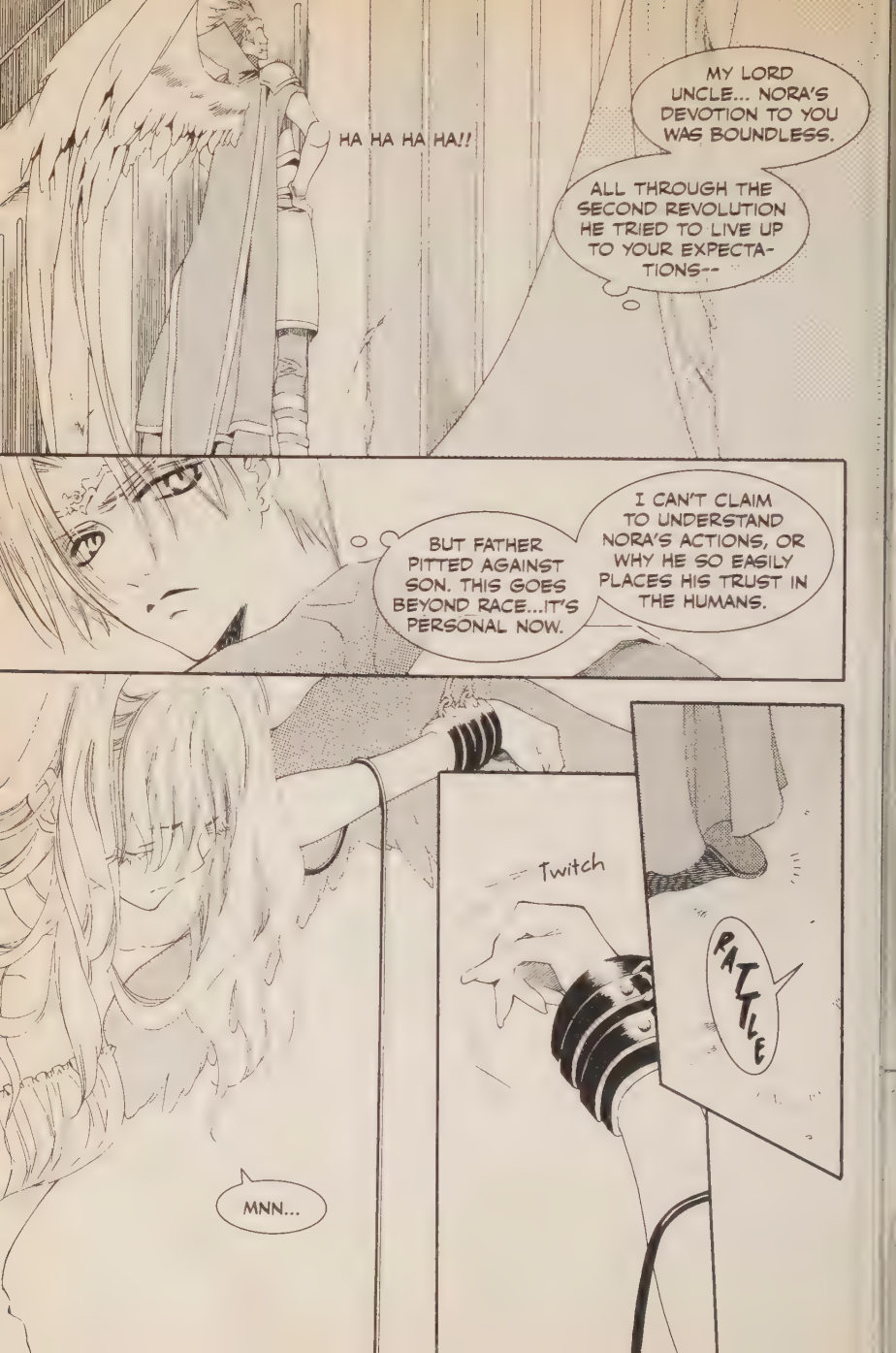


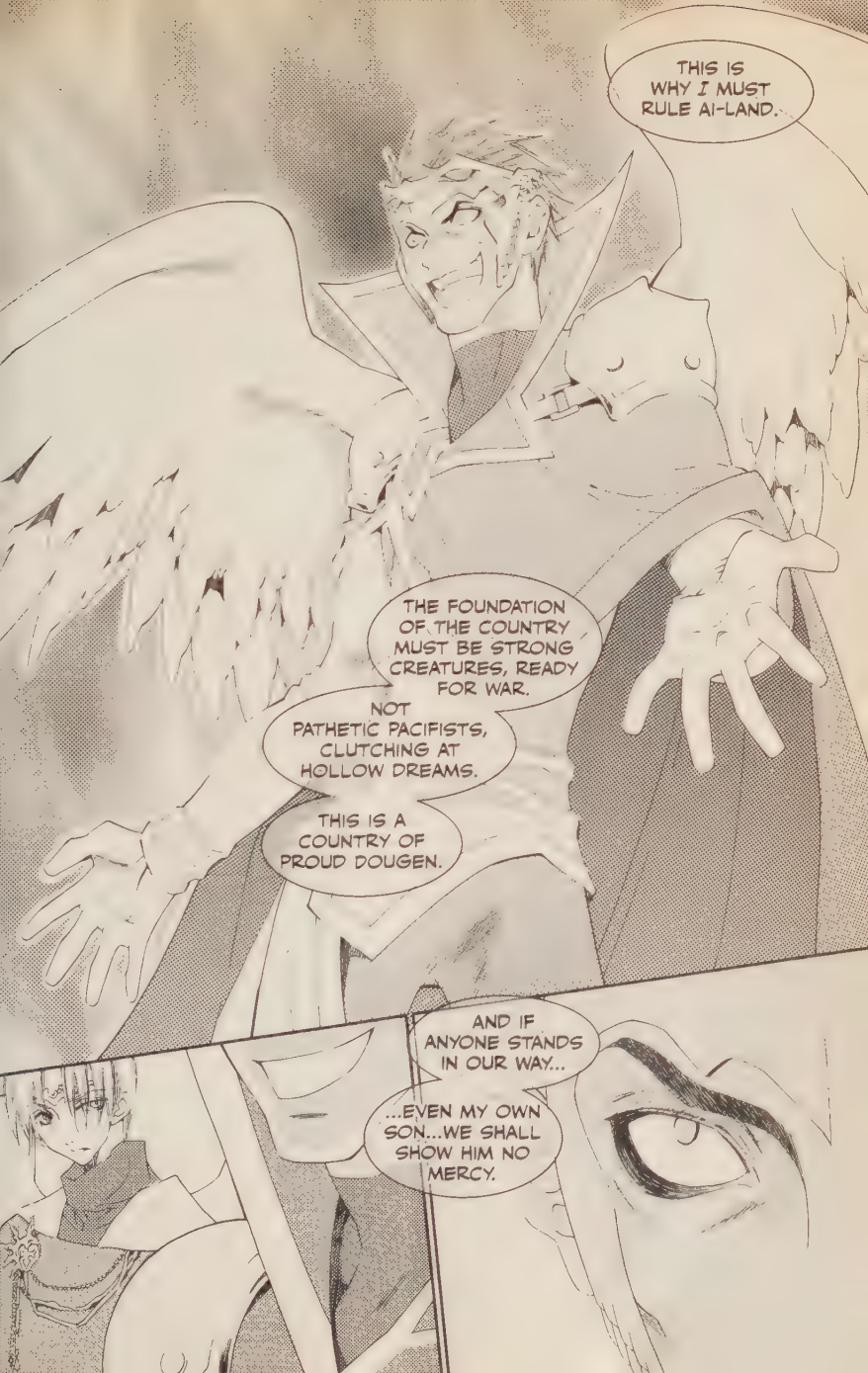

Blurble
BUT THEY WERE RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING. WITHOUT TENKETSU, WE WOULD NOT ENJOY THE LUXURY OF OUR MODERN AGE.
WE MUST BLEED TO LIVE...THE METAPHOR IS ALMOST TOO POTENT.
THE DOUGEN WERE THE MAIN COURSE IN THE ORGIASTIC HUMAN FEAST.
Glub glub
IT IS A LOATHSOME TECHNOLOGY, IS IT NOT?
HOW MANY HUNDREDS OF OUR BRETHREN WERE STRAPPED TO IT? WERE SLOWLY DRAINED OF THEIR BLOOD UNTIL THEY EXPIRED?
AND THE PRINCESS'S BLOOD IS PARTICULARLY...ROBUST. SO WE'RE TAKING THE LIBERTY.
FEAR NOT, KAZ.
SHE'S IMPORTANT TO OUR NEGOTIATIONS...
KAZ...
KAAAAZ...
...SO SHE WON'T BE KILLED.
EVEN NOW, SHE'S ONLY ANESTHETIZED.

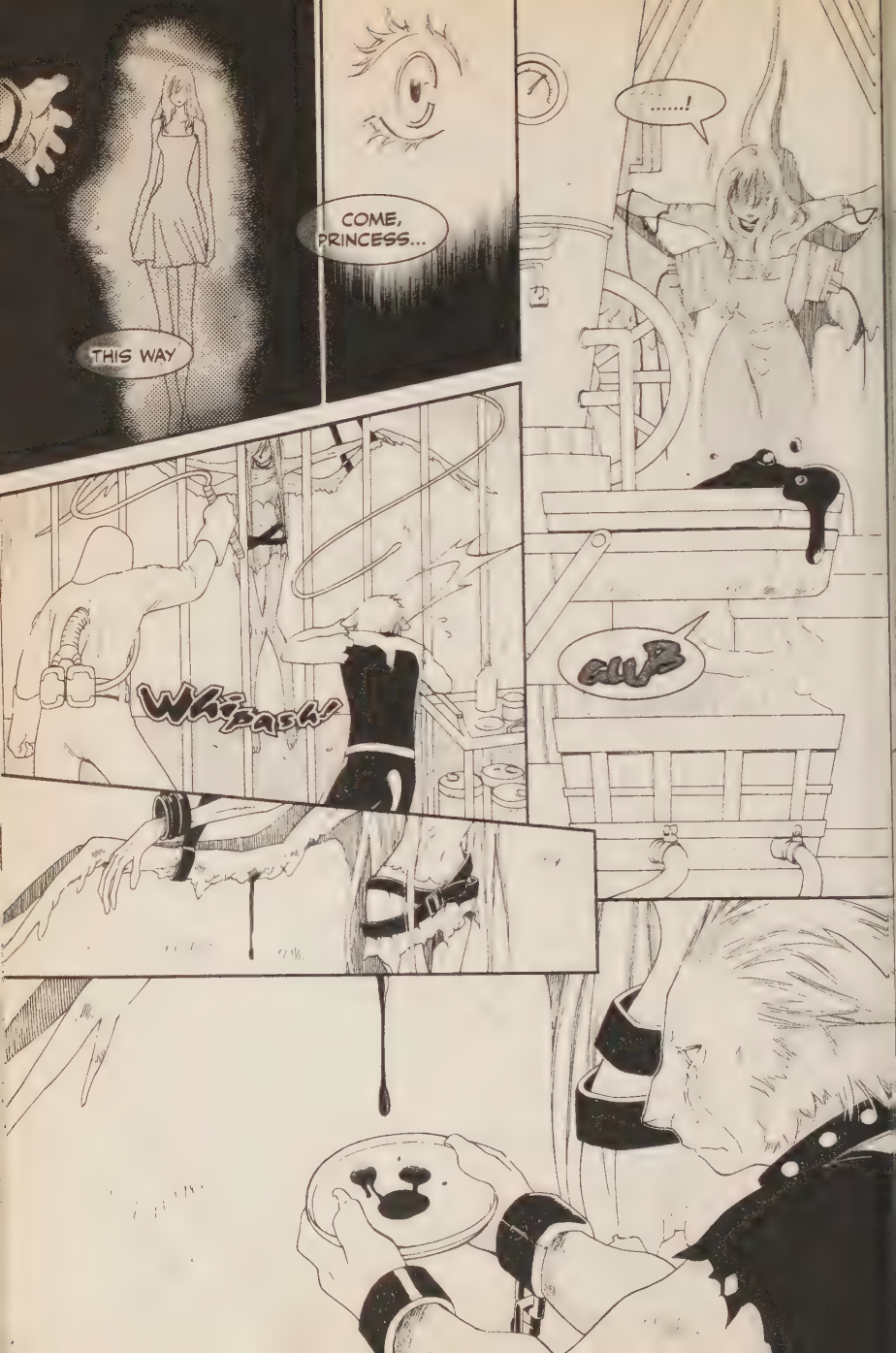
KING CLUB
TENKETSU--
I THOUGHT WE HAD DESTROYED THE BLEEDING MACHINES?!

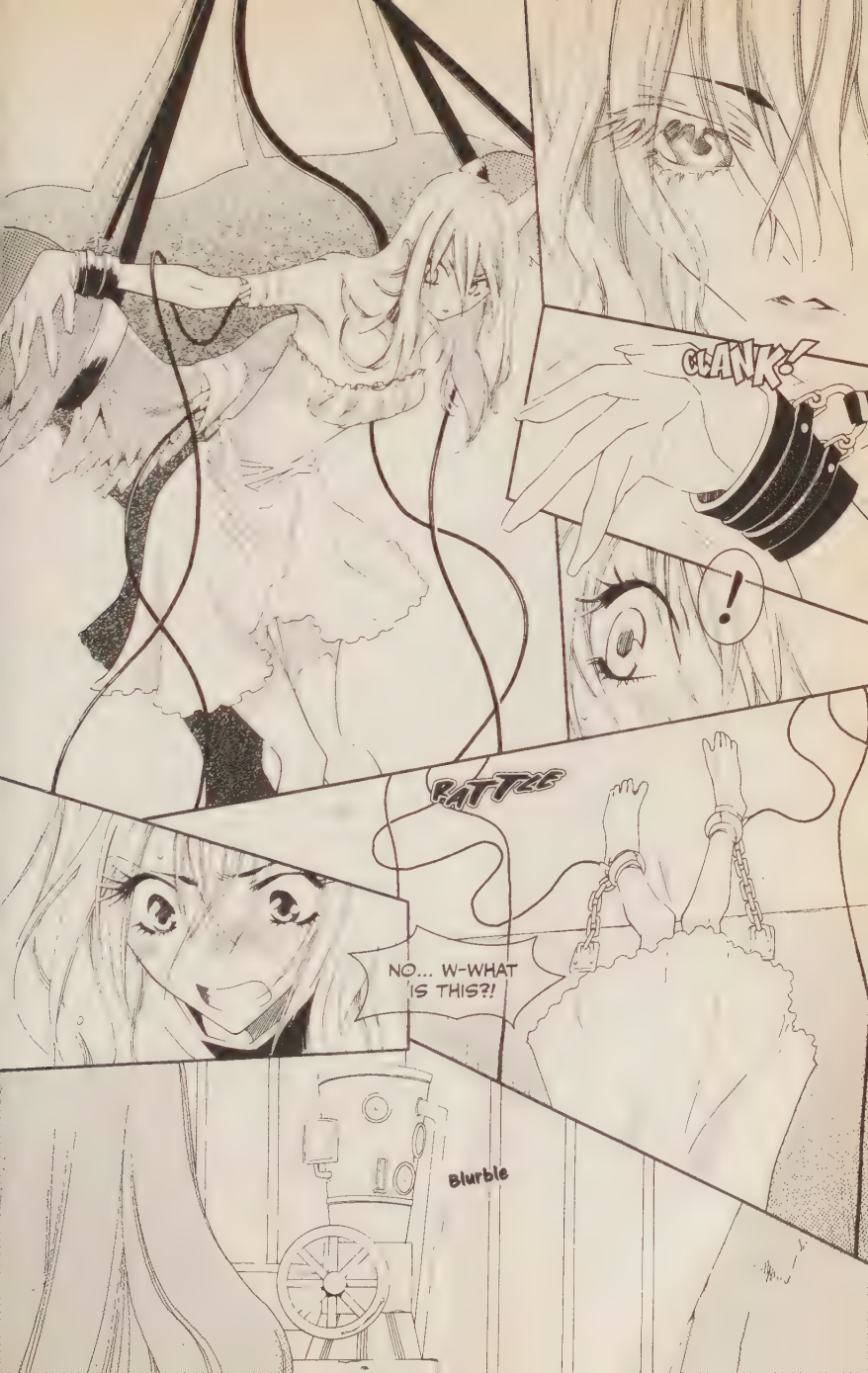

BUT...
I BELIEVED MY SON NORA...
...WHEN HE INSISTED THAT THE HUMANS HAD BEEN BLINDLY FOLLOWING SEI'S ORDERS.
...KING SEI FELL. THE DOUGEN SEEMED TO HAVE A FUTURE.
EVEN I BELIEVED WE COULD COOPERATE WITH THE HUMANS.
OUR STATUS IN SOCIETY IS STILL PATHETICALLY LOW.
WE ARE PROTECTED ONLY BY THE LETTER OF THE HUMANS' LAWS.
BUT NORA WAS WRONG.
THE HUMANS STILL SEE US AS BEASTS.
THERE IS NO LOVE, TRUST OR RESPECT BETWEEN DOUGEN AND HUMAN.
NORA IS... MY SON IS...
...WEAKENED BY HIS NEW POSITION OF POWER. THE CROWN SITS LOW OVER HIS EYES, SO HE CANNOT SEE THE TRUTH.


IS IT TRULY A CRIME TO DO AS THE HUMANS DO, KAZ?
KING SEI AND HIS HUMANS SHAMELESSLY ENSLAVED, BLED AND KILLED US DOUGEN FOR YEARS.
MY SISTER MIE--YOUR MOTHER--DIED BY THEIR FILTHY HANDS.
BUT STEALING OUR LIVES, OUR VERY BLOOD, WAS NOT ENOUGH.
SEI STOLE MY WIFE FROM ME AS WELL.
IF YOU WEIGH HIS SINS AGAINST MINE... WELL, I'VE BARELY SCRATCHED THE SURFACE OF REVENGE.
BUT WE... WE'RE NOT HUMANS.
WE'RE DOUGEN.
HOW CAN WE COMMIT THE SAME HORRIFIC CRIMES?!


HA HA HA HA!!
MY LORD UNCLE... NORA'S DEVOTION TO YOU WAS BOUNDLESS.
ALL THROUGH THE SECOND REVOLUTION HE TRIED TO LIVE UP TO YOUR EXPECTATIONS--
I CAN'T CLAIM TO UNDERSTAND NORA'S ACTIONS, OR WHY HE SO EASILY PLACES HIS TRUST IN THE HUMANS.
BUT FATHER PITTED AGAINST SON. THIS GOES BEYOND RACE...IT'S PERSONAL NOW.
Twitch
RATTLE
MNN...


THIS IS WHY I MUST RULE AI-LAND.
THE FOUNDATION OF THE COUNTRY MUST BE STRONG CREATURES, READY FOR WAR.
NOT PATHETIC PACIFISTS, CLUTCHING AT HOLLOW DREAMS.
THIS IS A COUNTRY OF PROUD DOUGEN.
AND IF ANYONE STANDS IN OUR WAY...
...EVEN MY OWN SON...WE SHALL SHOW HIM NO MERCY.

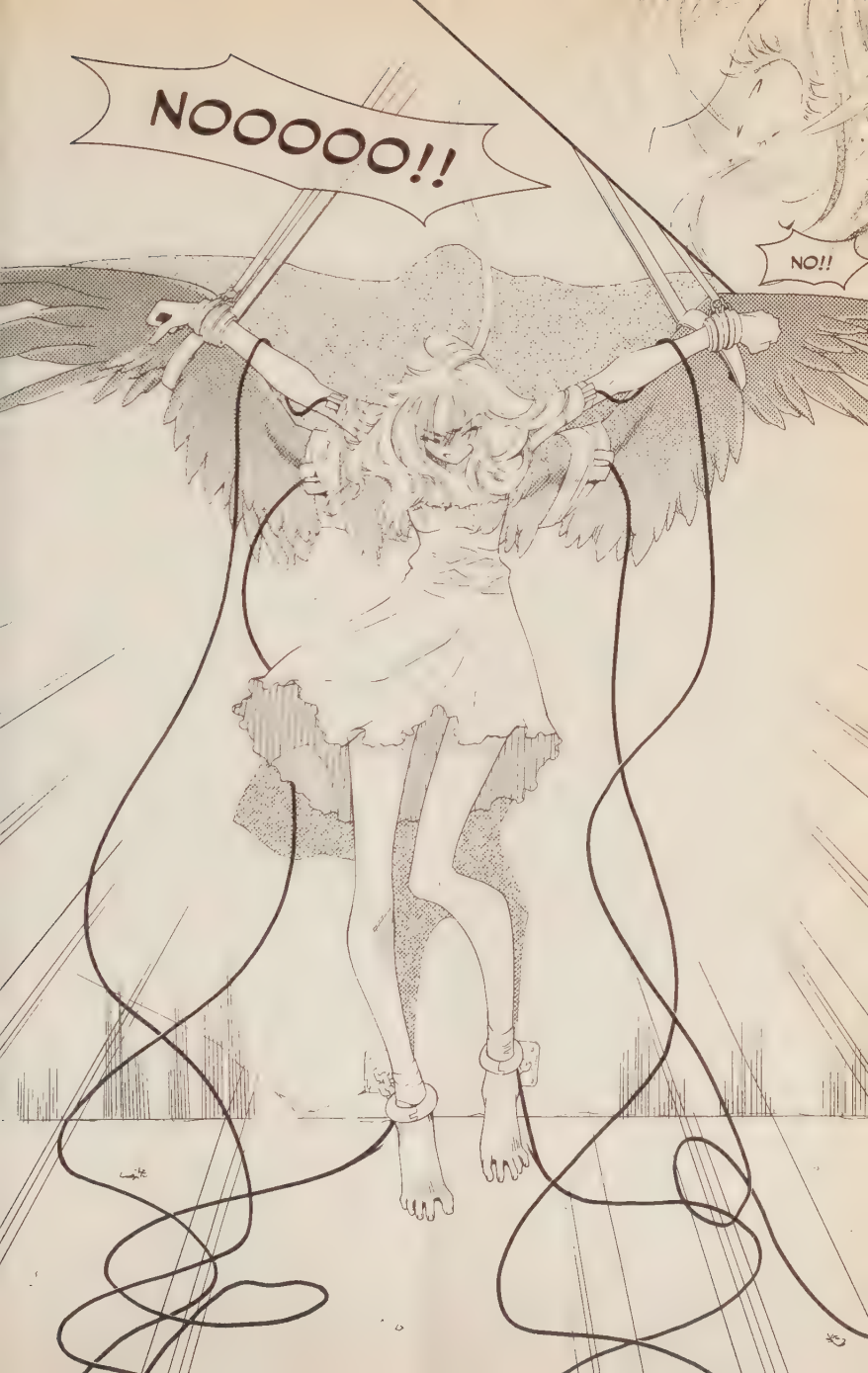

THIS WAY
COME, PRINCESS...
.....!
Whabash!
CLUB

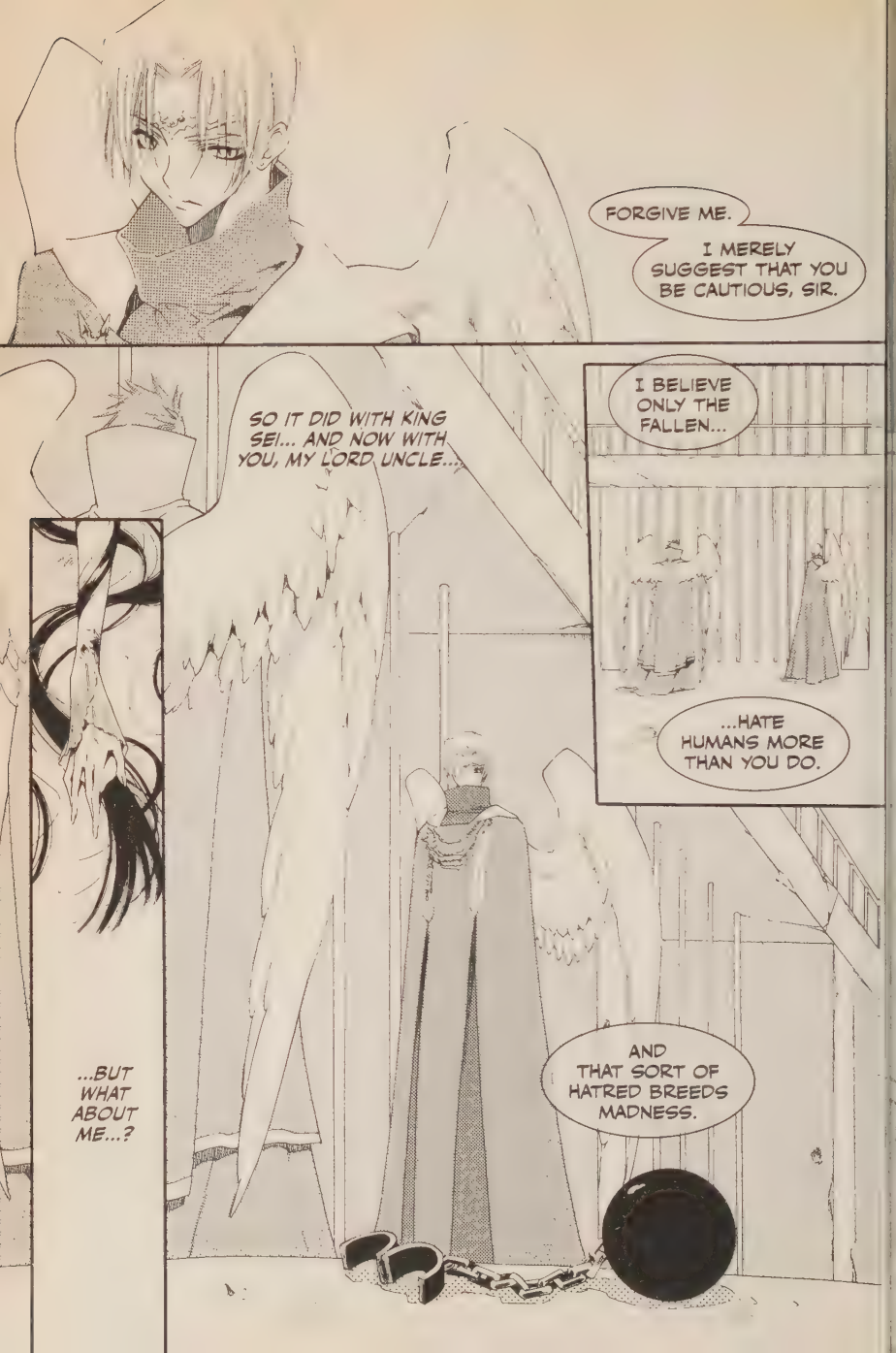

CLANK!
!
RATTLE
NO... W-WHAT IS THIS?!
Blurble

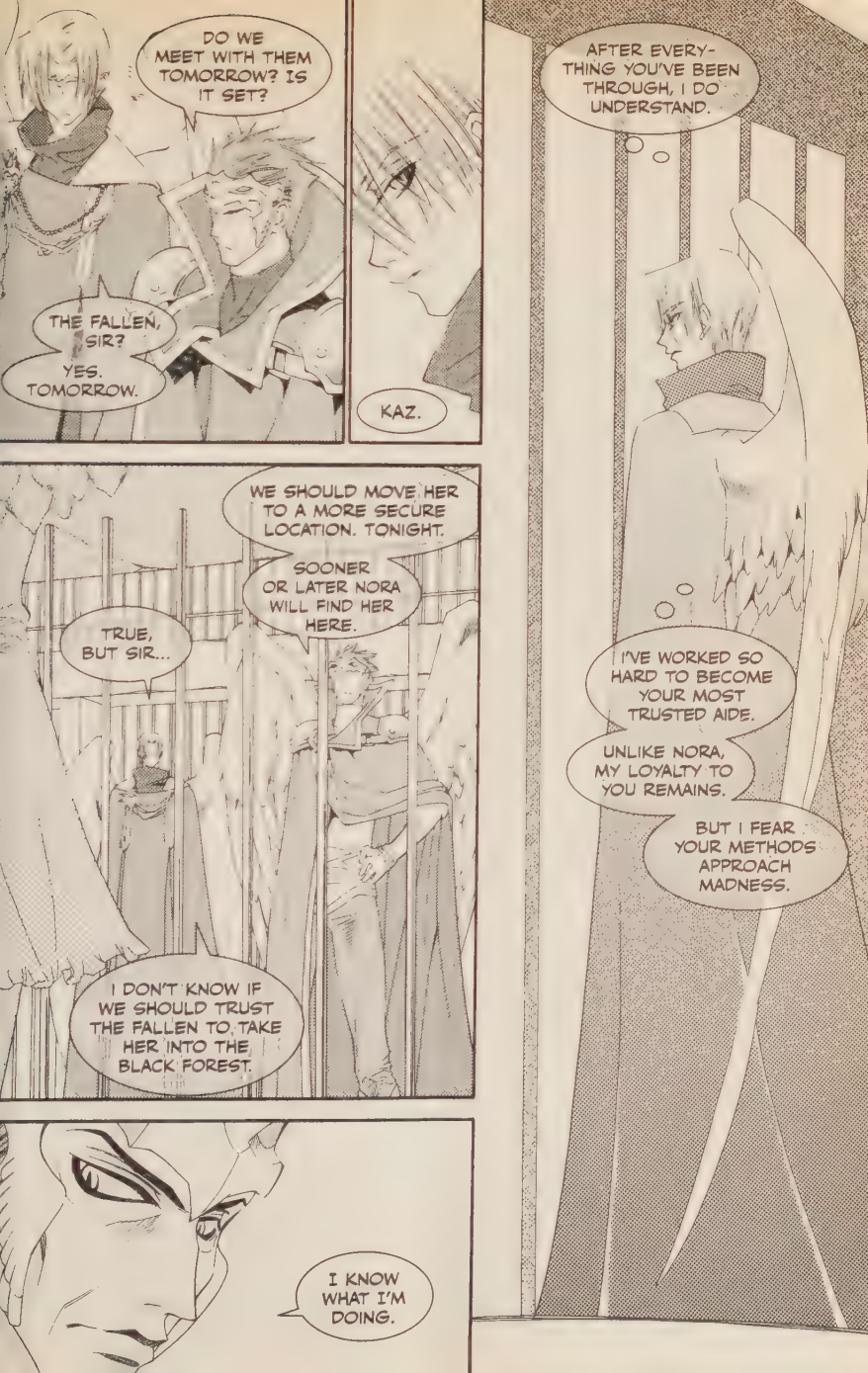
HEY! GET THAT CORPSE OUT OF HERE!
.....!!
NO....
NO!!
CLUB
Plip

HOW COULD THEY... HOW COULD...?
FWUMP

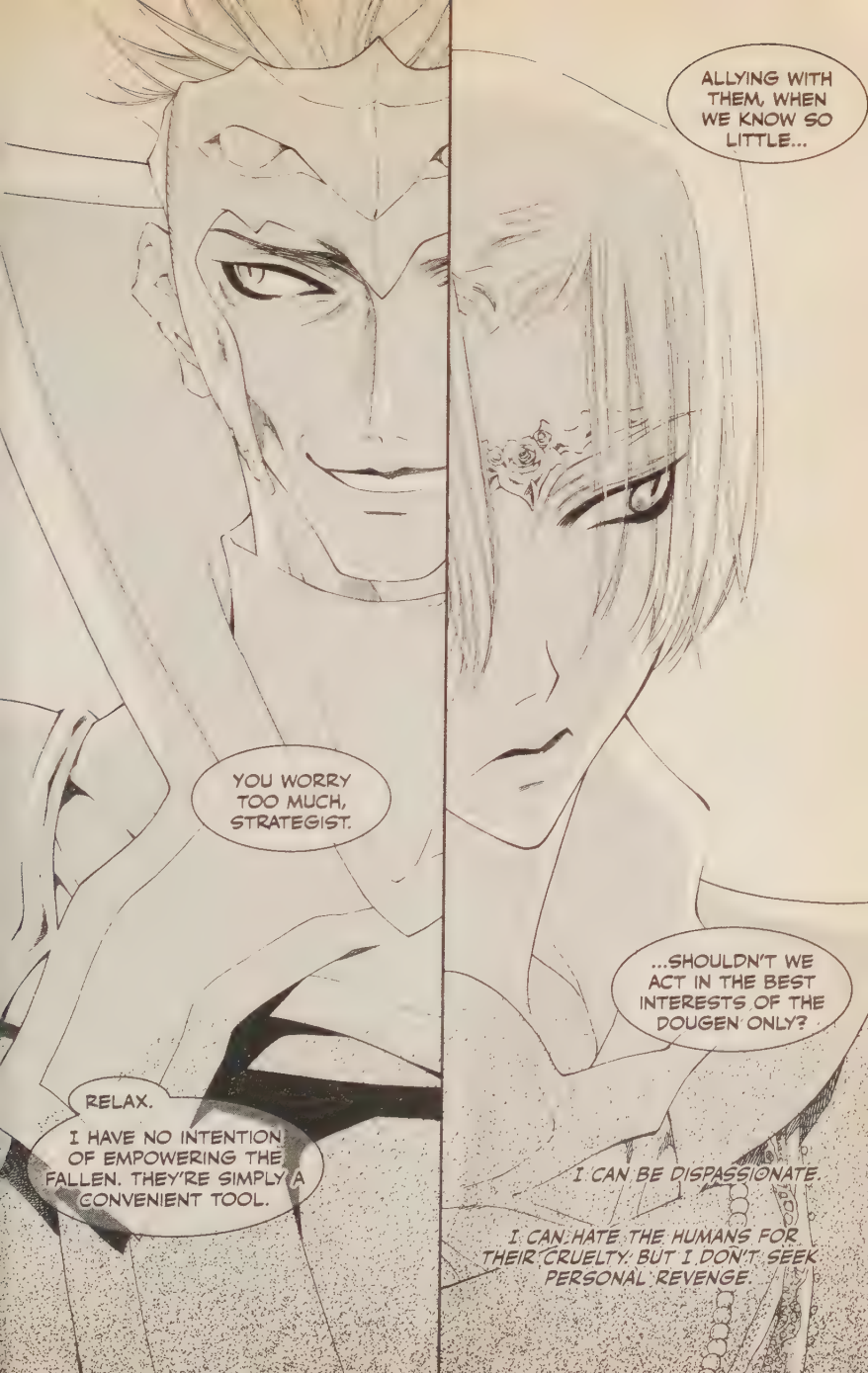
Nod
YOU HATE THIS HUMAN AND DOUGEN HALF-BREED SO MUCH?
MY LORD UNCLE... WAS THIS SADISM INEVITABLE? WHEN THOSE YOU LOVED WERE TAKEN FROM YOU ONE BY ONE...
WHEN YOUR ONLY SON DONNED THE ROYAL ROBES ALONGSIDE THE HATED PRINCESS HAD YOU NO CHOICE BUT TO HARDEN INTO CRUELTY?
Whisper
MMM. BEAUTIFUL.


NOOOOO!!
NO!!


FORGIVE ME.
I MERELY SUGGEST THAT YOU BE CAUTIOUS, SIR.
I BELIEVE ONLY THE FALLEN...
...HATE HUMANS MORE THAN YOU DO.
SO IT DID WITH KING SEI... AND NOW WITH YOU, MY LORD UNCLE...
AND THAT SORT OF HATRED BREEDS MADNESS.
...BUT WHAT ABOUT ME...?


DO WE MEET WITH THEM TOMORROW? IS IT SET?
THE FALLEN, SIR?
YES. TOMORROW.
KAZ.
AFTER EVERY-THING YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH, I DO UNDERSTAND.
I'VE WORKED SO HARD TO BECOME YOUR MOST TRUSTED AIDE.
UNLIKE NORA, MY LOYALTY TO YOU REMAINS.
BUT I FEAR YOUR METHODS APPROACH MADNESS.
WE SHOULD MOVE HER TO A MORE SECURE LOCATION. TONIGHT.
SOONER OR LATER NORA WILL FIND HER HERE.
TRUE, BUT SIR...
I DON'T KNOW IF WE SHOULD TRUST THE FALLEN TO TAKE HER INTO THE BLACK FOREST.
I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.

Grab
ALL WE MUST DO IS CLAIM THE FINAL PIECE OF THE PRISM AND TAKE AI-LAND BACK FROM NORA.
WITH THE PRISM COMPLETE, PERHAPS EVEN THE OTHER SIDE WILL FALL UNDER OUR CONTROL.
YOU WON'T LOSE COURAGE NOW, WILL YOU, NEPHEW? AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE ENDGAME?
UNPLEASANT MEANS...FOR THAT GLORIOUS END.
I'M COUNTING ON YOU, KAZ.
NO SIR.
I WILL NOT DISAPPOINT, MY LORD UNCLE.
"UNPLEASANT?" THE HUMANS AND THE FALLEN...
...WOLVES AT BOTH DOORS.

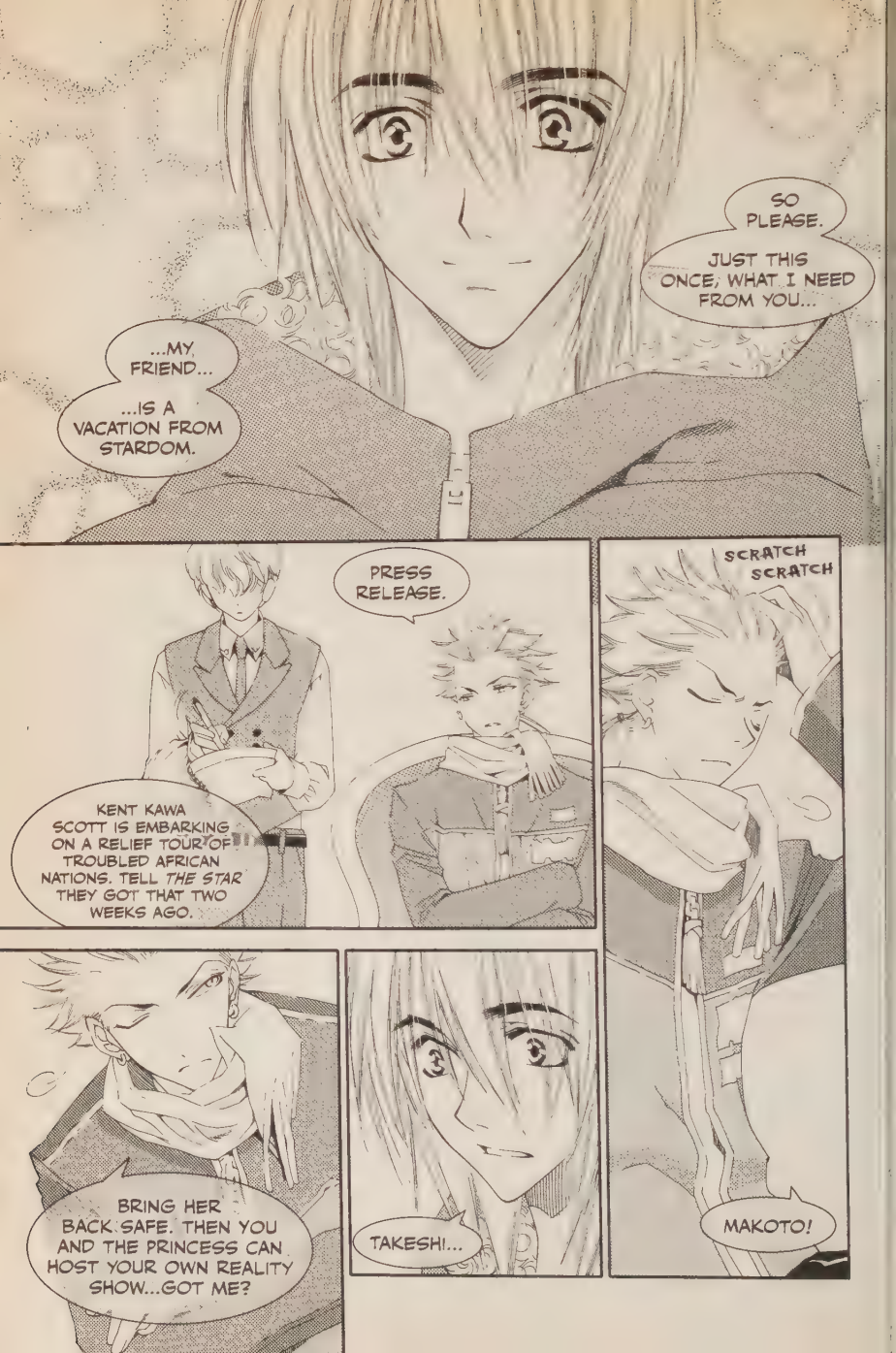

ALLYING WITH THEM, WHEN WE KNOW SO LITTLE...
YOU WORRY TOO MUCH, STRATEGIST.
...SHOULDN'T WE ACT IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE DOUGEN ONLY?
RELAX.
I HAVE NO INTENTION OF EMPOWERING THE FALLEN. THEY'RE SIMPLY A CONVENIENT TOOL.
I CAN BE DISPASSIONATE.
I CAN HATE THE HUMANS FOR THEIR CRUELTY. BUT I DON'T SEEK PERSONAL REVENGE.

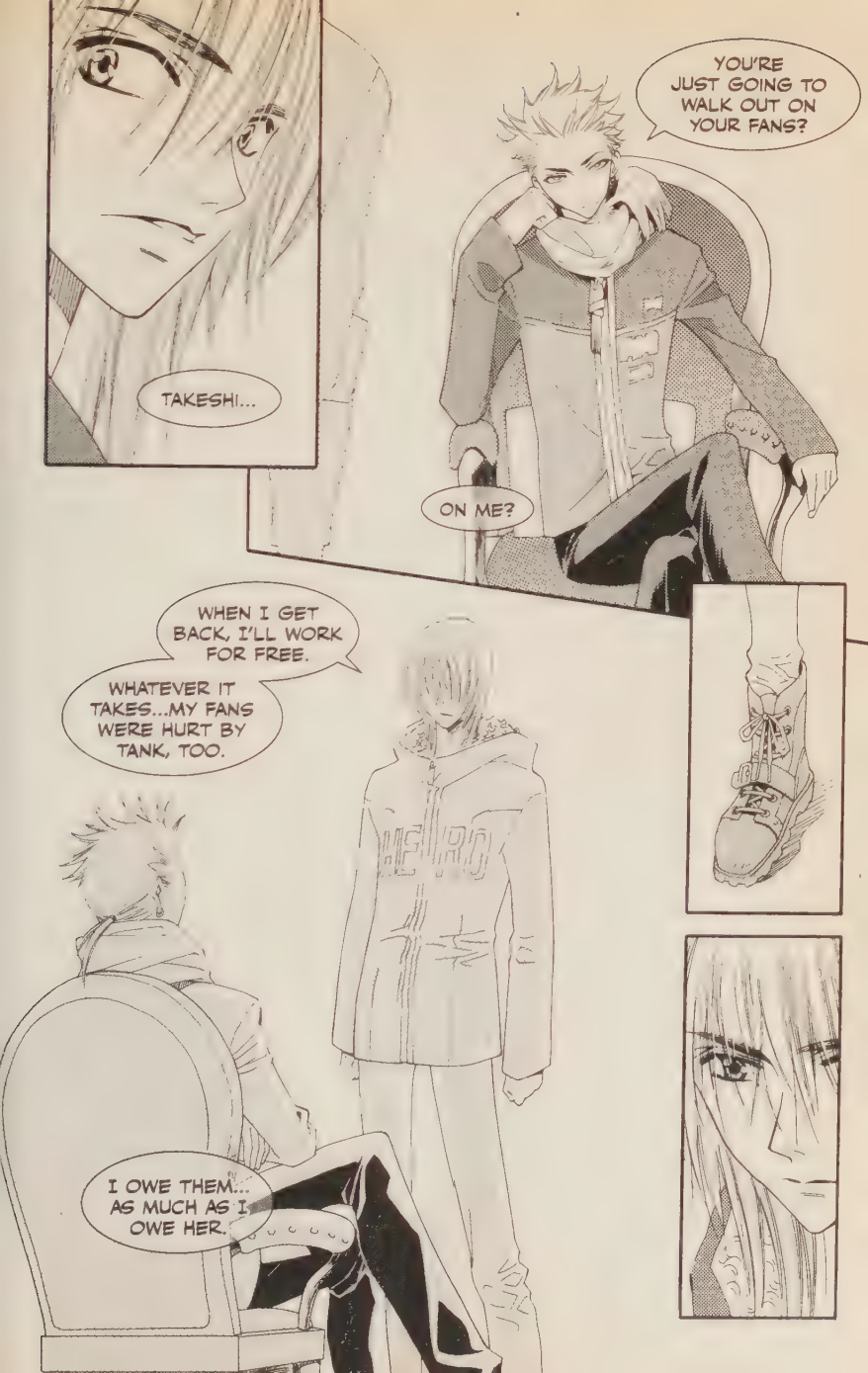
HIKARU... IT'S OKAY.
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO COME.
Roll Roll
I DID! YOU'RE GOING TO AI-LAND TO SAVE AI, RIGHT?
YOU NEED CLOTHES AND A TOOTHBRUSH AND A SWEATER AND...
YOU DRAGGED THAT SUITCASE ALL THE WAY HERE?
I DID! BUT I LEFT THE TANK AT HOME.
TANK--
THANKS, HIKARU.

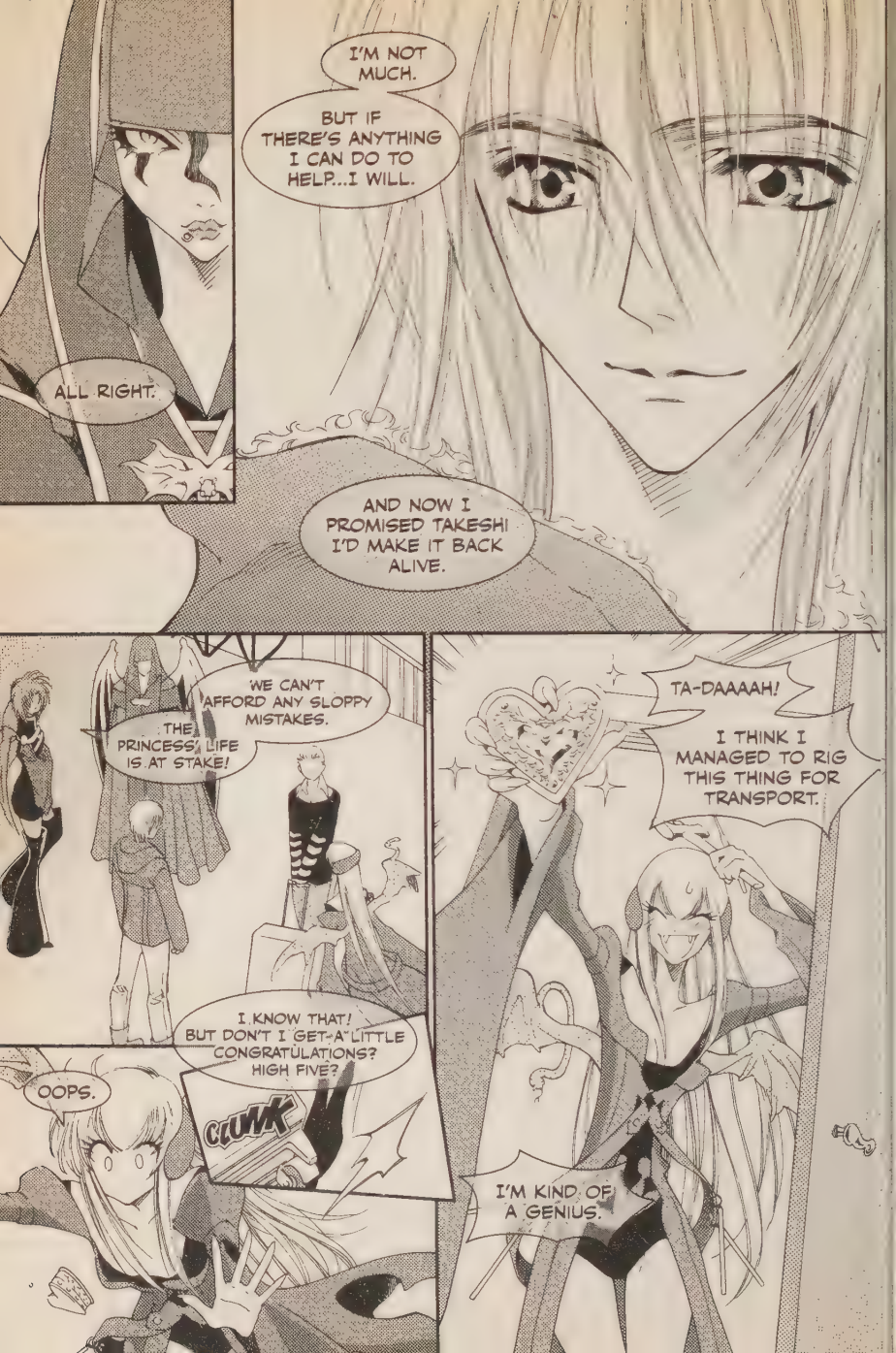
Club Cupid
WHAM
KENT!
ARE YOU STILL HERE?

JUST HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO GET TO AI-LAND? MAGIC CARPET?
IRE
IRE
...
SO, KENT...
I ASKED MEGGI TO SET UP A WARP FOR ME. IT'LL BE SAFE RIGHT?
YOU'RE A STAR, KENT.
HTA'S INVESTED IN YOU.

NO. THE FURIES WERE JUST FILLING ME IN ON AI'S MISSION NOW.
DO WE KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO AI? WHO TOOK HER?
THERE'S SOMETHING AWFUL CONNECTING EARTH AND AI-LAND.
AH, WELL. WHAT ELSE AM I GOOD FOR, BESIDES LOOKING PRETTY?
THAT'S WHY AI RISKED RETURNING TO EARTH.
AI...
WHY DID YOU PUT YOURSELF IN DANGER.
AND ALL THAT TIME I WAS BLISSED OUT ON TANK.
I OWE HER...


...MY FRIEND...
...IS A VACATION FROM STARDOM.
SO PLEASE.
JUST THIS ONCE, WHAT I NEED FROM YOU...
PRESS RELEASE.
KENT KAWA SCOTT IS EMBARKING ON A RELIEF TOUR OF TROUBLED AFRICAN NATIONS. TELL *THE STAR* THEY GOT THAT TWO WEEKS AGO.
SCRATCH SCRATCH
MAKOTO!
TAKESHI...
BRING HER BACK SAFE. THEN YOU AND THE PRINCESS CAN HOST YOUR OWN REALITY SHOW...GOT ME?


TAKESHI...
YOU'RE JUST GOING TO WALK OUT ON YOUR FANS?
ON ME?
WHEN I GET BACK, I'LL WORK FOR FREE.
WHATEVER IT TAKES...MY FANS WERE HURT BY TANK, TOO.
I OWE THEM... AS MUCH AS I OWE HER.

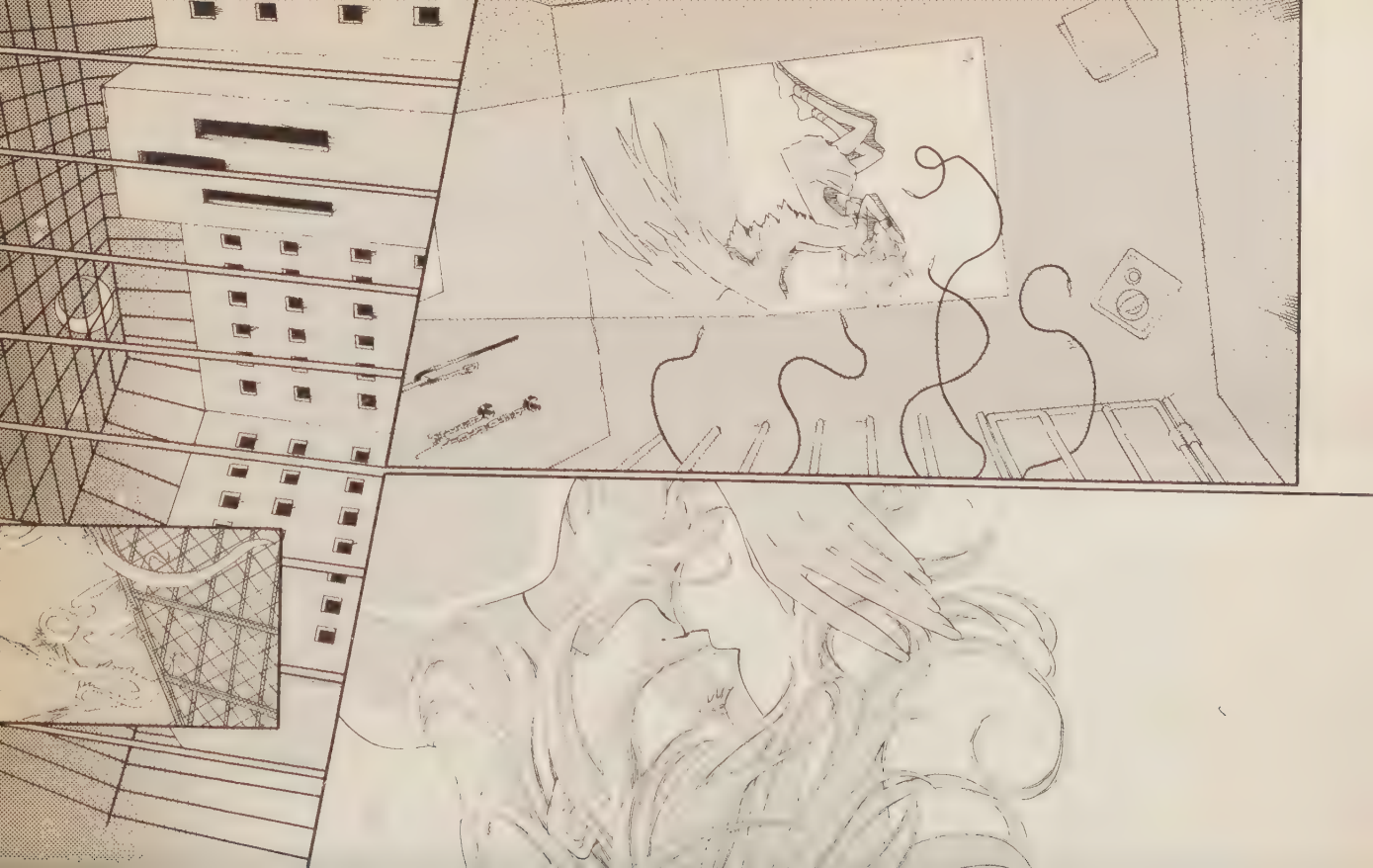

I'M NOT MUCH.
BUT IF THERE'S ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP...I WILL.
ALL RIGHT.
AND NOW I PROMISED TAKESHI I'D MAKE IT BACK ALIVE.
WE CAN'T AFFORD ANY SLOPPY MISTAKES.
THE PRINCESS' LIFE IS AT STAKE!
I KNOW THAT! BUT DON'T I GET-A-LITTLE CONGRATULATIONS? HIGH FIVE?
CLUNK
OOPS.
TA-DAAAAH!
I THINK I MANAGED TO RIG THIS THING FOR TRANSPORT.
I'M KIND OF A GENIUS.

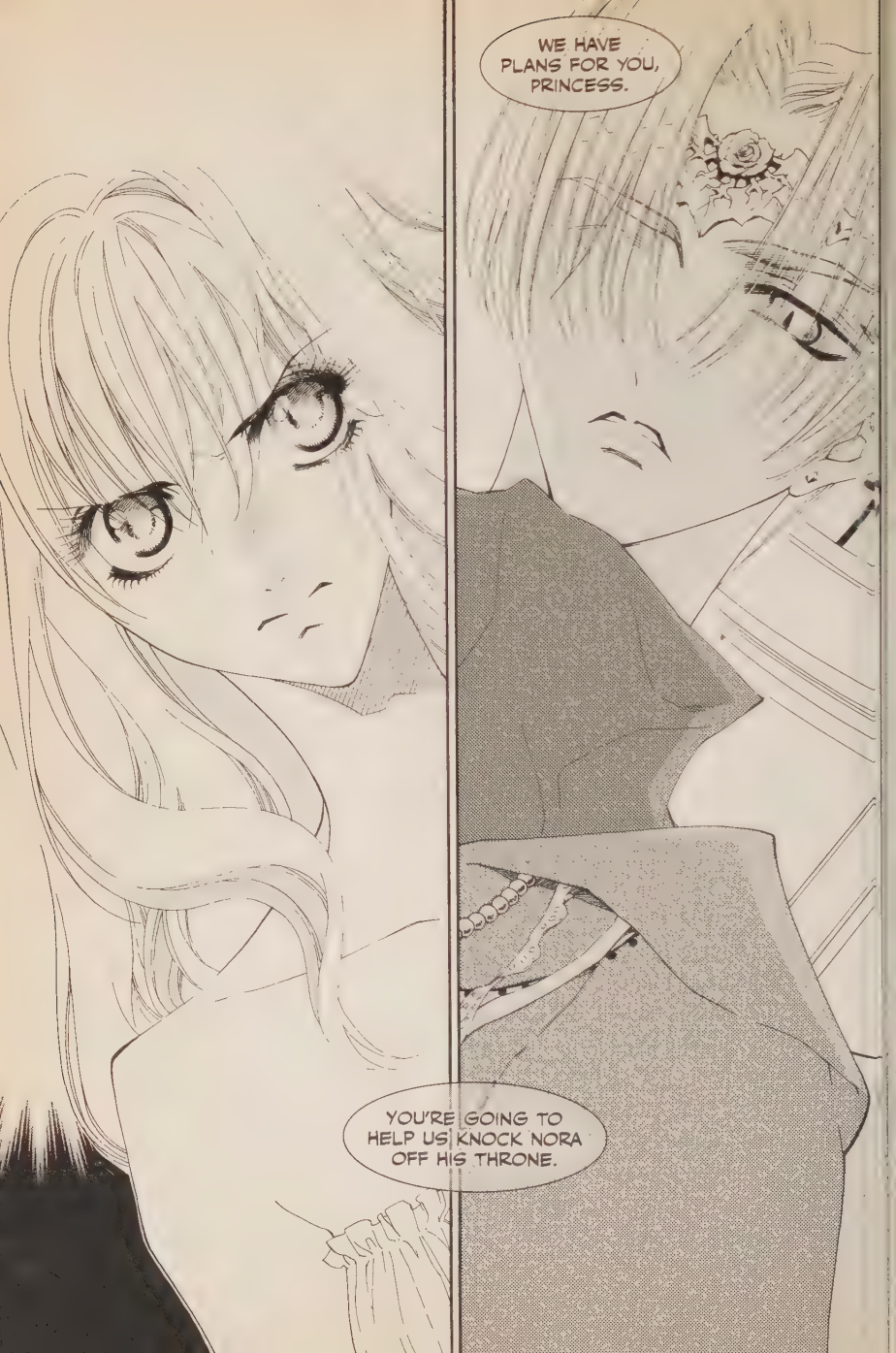
AND IF YOU GET YOURSELF KILLED IN AI-LAND, I'M BURYING YOUR BODY IN KENYA.
HTA STILL OWNS YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL AND BACK CATALOGUE, SO YOUR CORPSE IS MY COLLATERAL.
THANKS, TAKESHI.
AI-LAND IS NOTHING LIKE EARTH.
IF YOU STAKE YOUR LIFE ON THIS FIGHT, THERE MAY BE NO ONE TO SAVE IT FOR YOU.
HAVE YOU REALLY THOUGHT THIS THROUGH, KENT?
YOU HAVE NO COMBAT EXPERIENCE. ARE YOU TRULY PREPARED FOR WHAT YOU MAY FACE?
ALEXA...
YES...
BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER. I'M DOING THIS FOR AI.

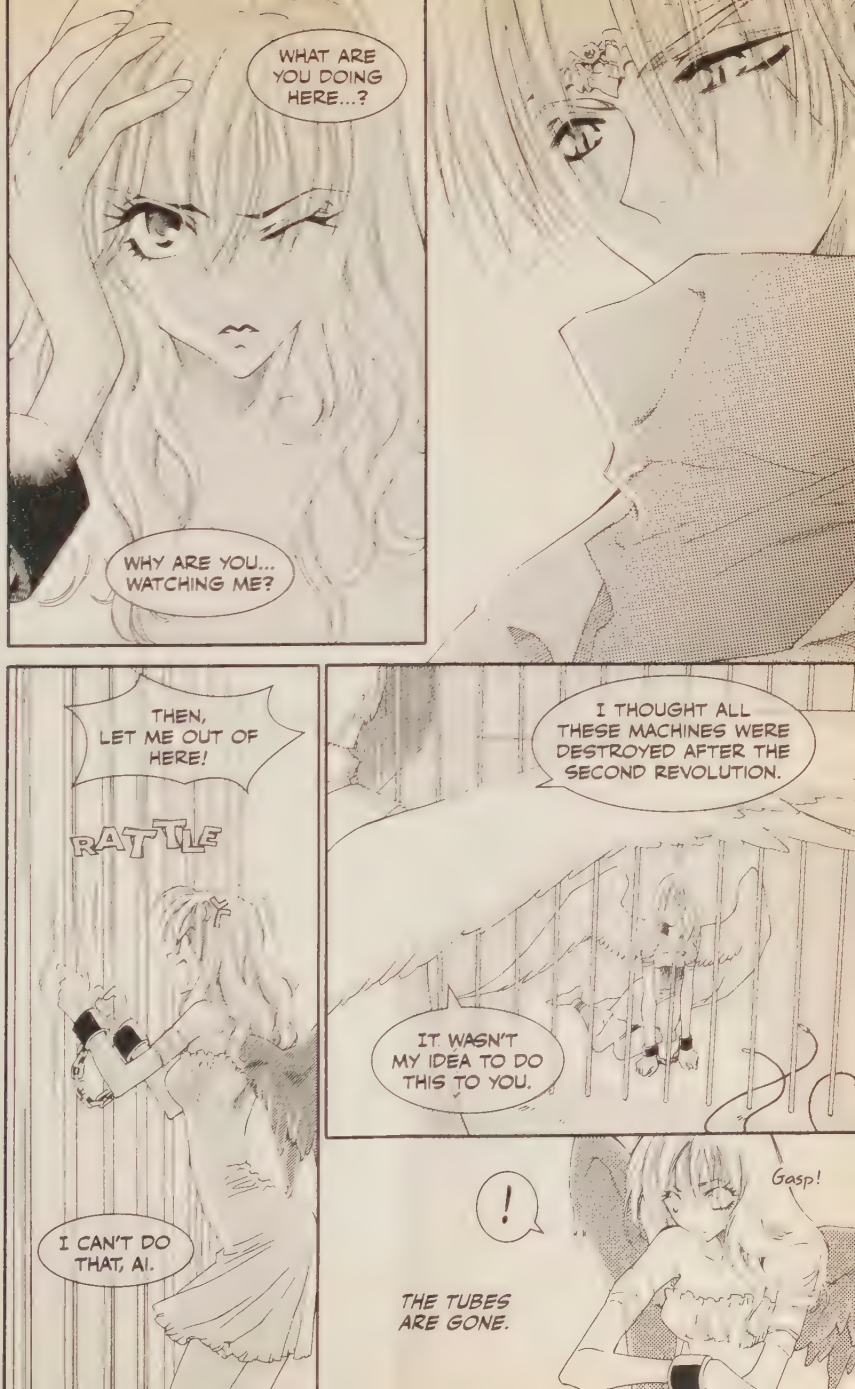
AND THERE THEY GO.
MY TWO BIGGEST STARS LOST IN A HEART-SHAPED WORMHOLE.
WAIT... WAS HIKARU SUPPOSED TO GO WITH THEM?
NO... BUT...HE'S NOT HERE, SO...

AH!
FLASH
Tink
AAAH!

FLAP
NNN...
jingle
.....KAZ?




WE HAVE PLANS FOR YOU, PRINCESS.
YOU'RE GOING TO HELP US KNOCK NORA OFF HIS THRONE.

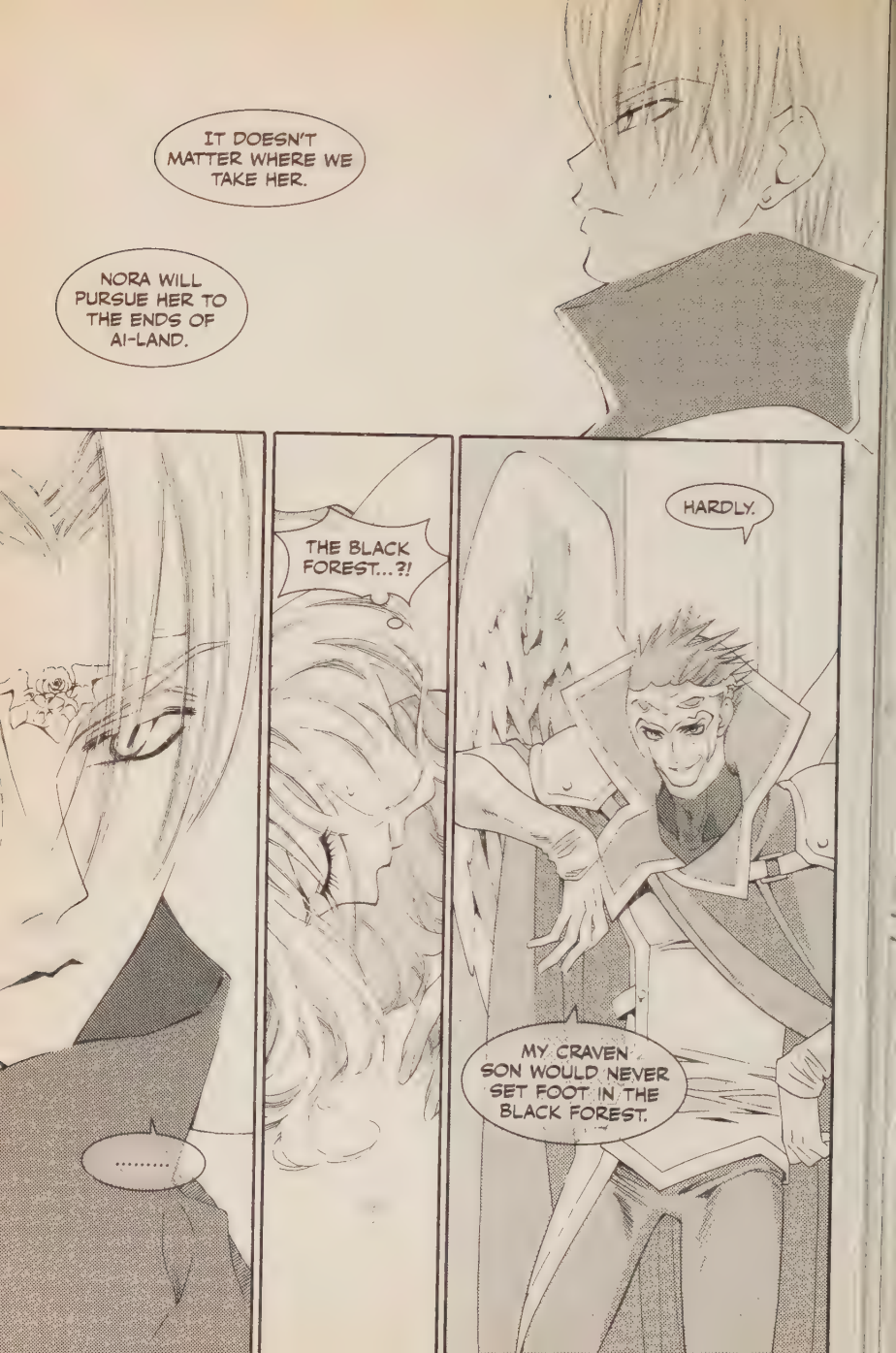

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE...?
WHY ARE YOU... WATCHING ME?
THEN, LET ME OUT OF HERE!
RATTLE
I CAN'T DO THAT, AI.
I THOUGHT ALL THESE MACHINES WERE DESTROYED AFTER THE SECOND REVOLUTION.
IT WASN'T MY IDEA TO DO THIS TO YOU.
!
THE TUBES ARE GONE.
Gasp!

Tap
PRETEND YOU'RE STILL ASLEEP.
CLACK
CREEEAK
!!

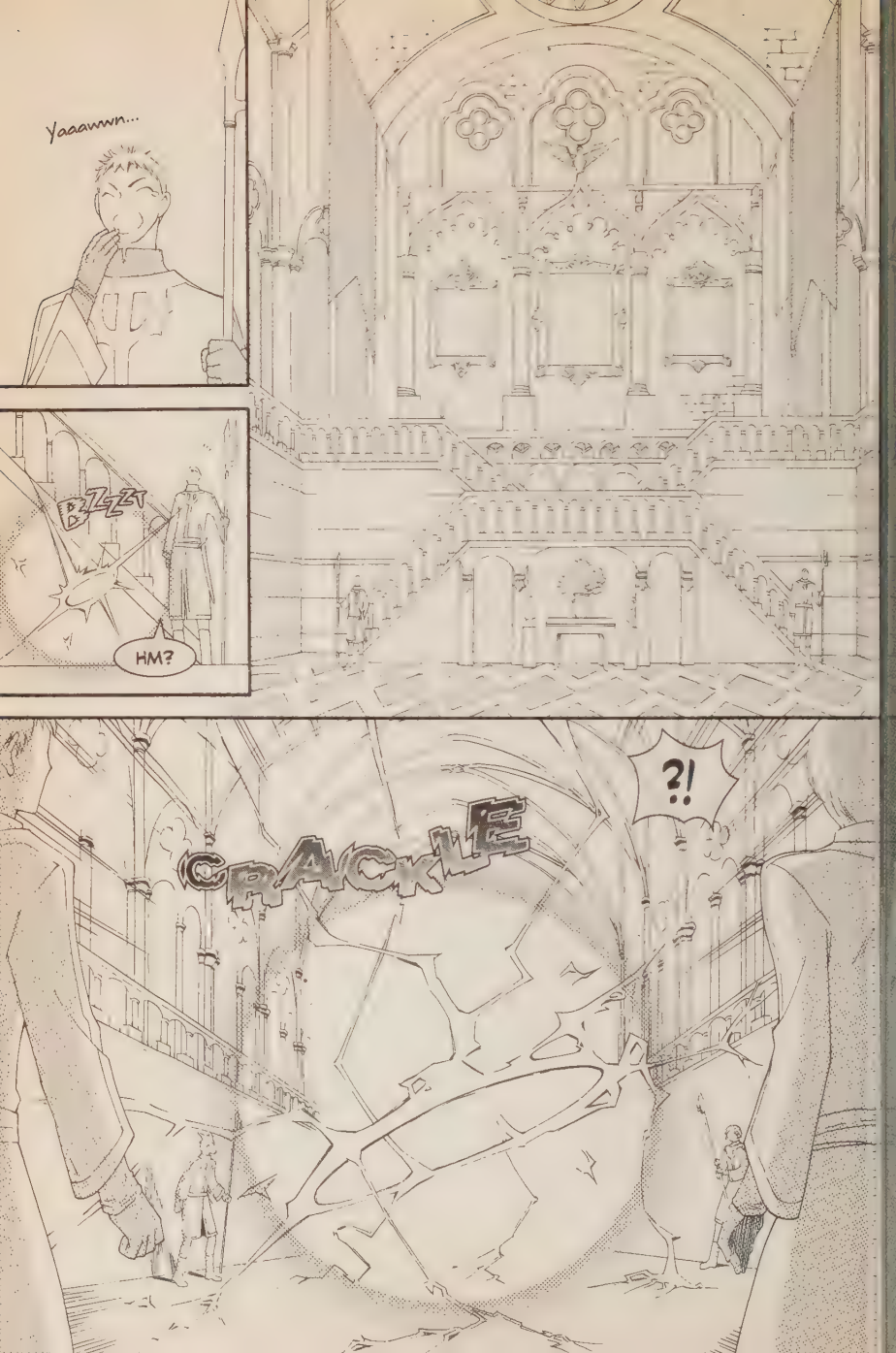
Tower

CHAPTER

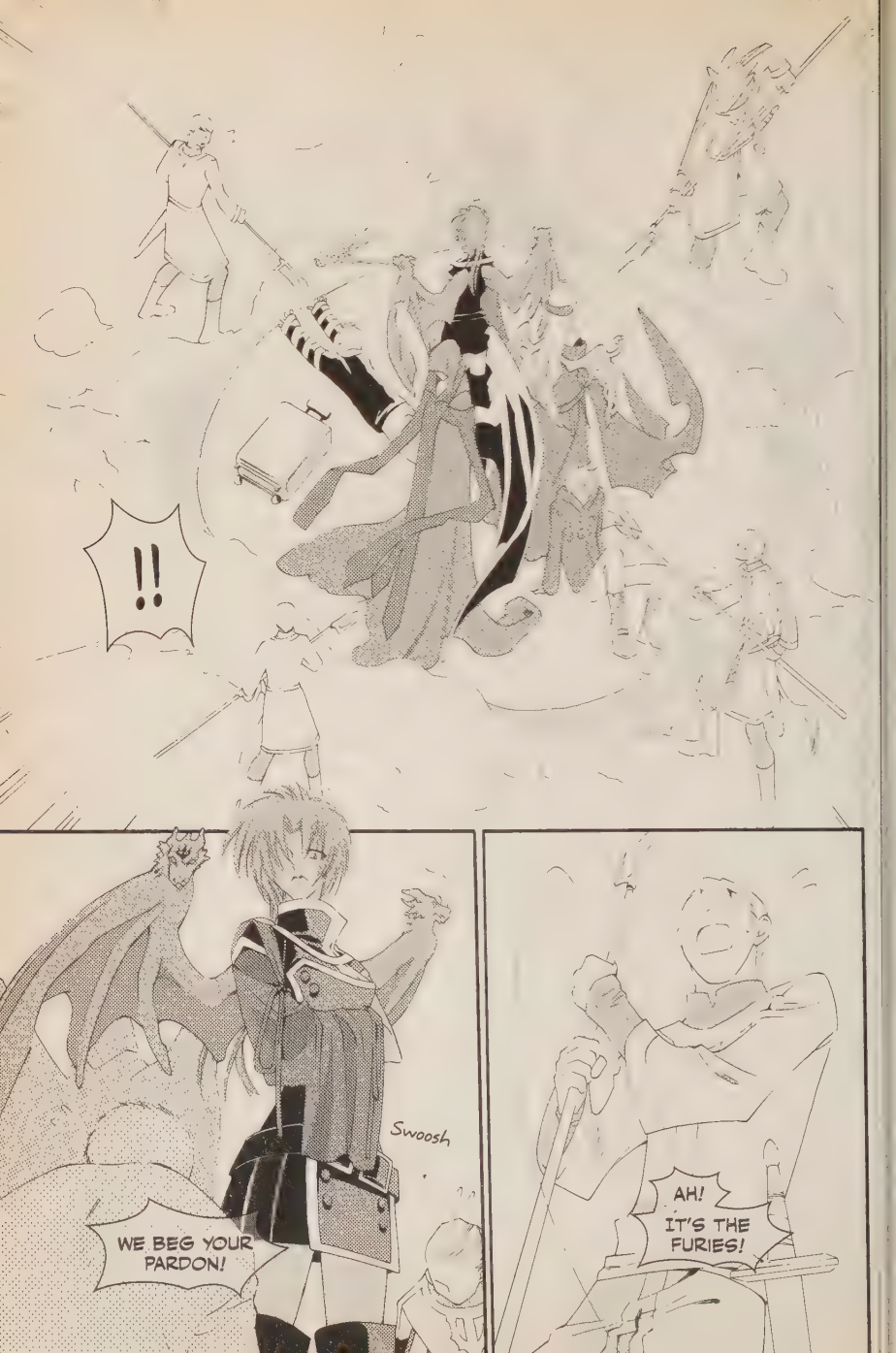
8

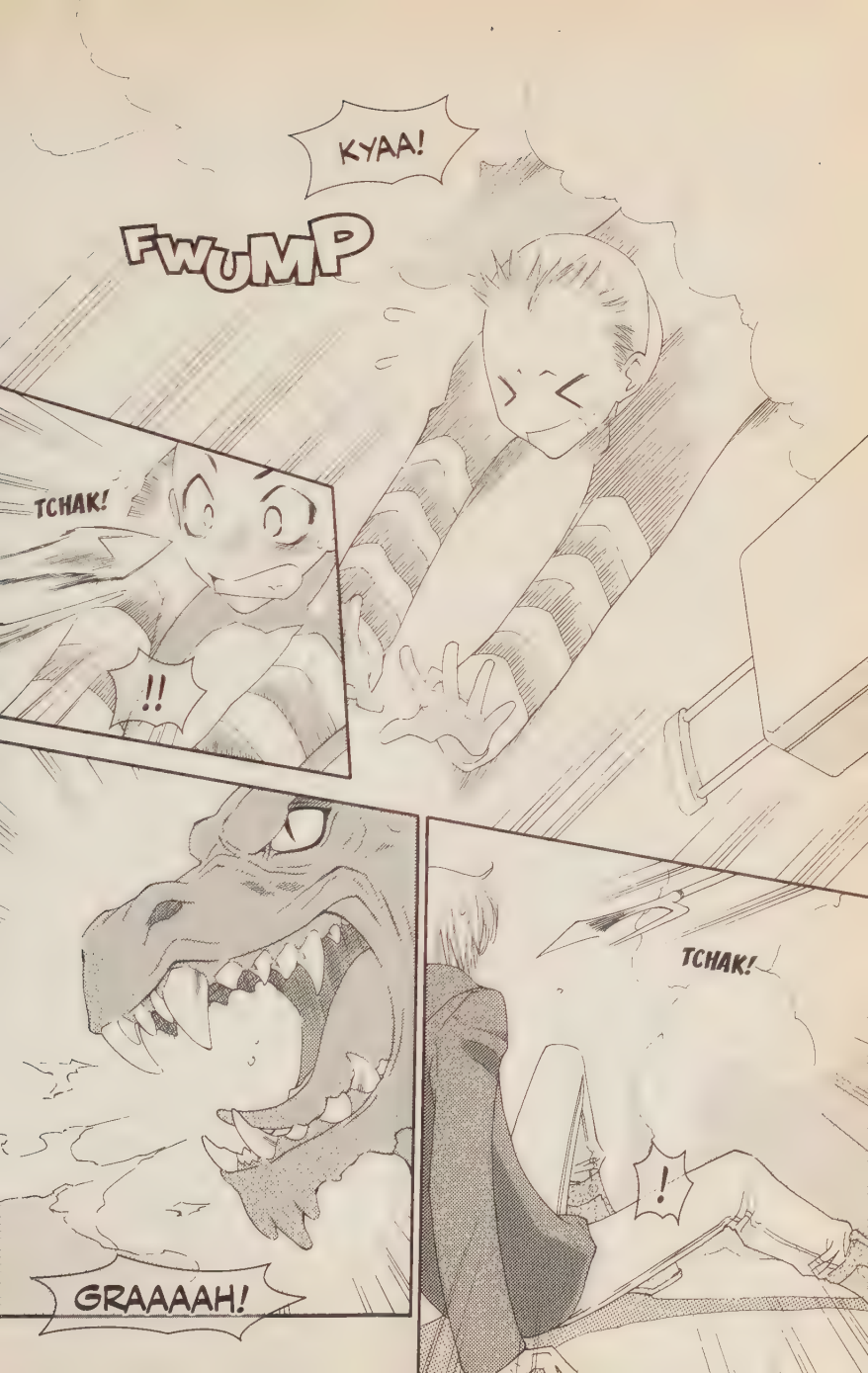

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE WE TAKE HER.
NORA WILL PURSUE HER TO THE ENDS OF AI-LAND.
.....
THE BLACK FOREST...?!
HARDLY.
MY CRAVEN SON WOULD NEVER SET FOOT IN THE BLACK FOREST.

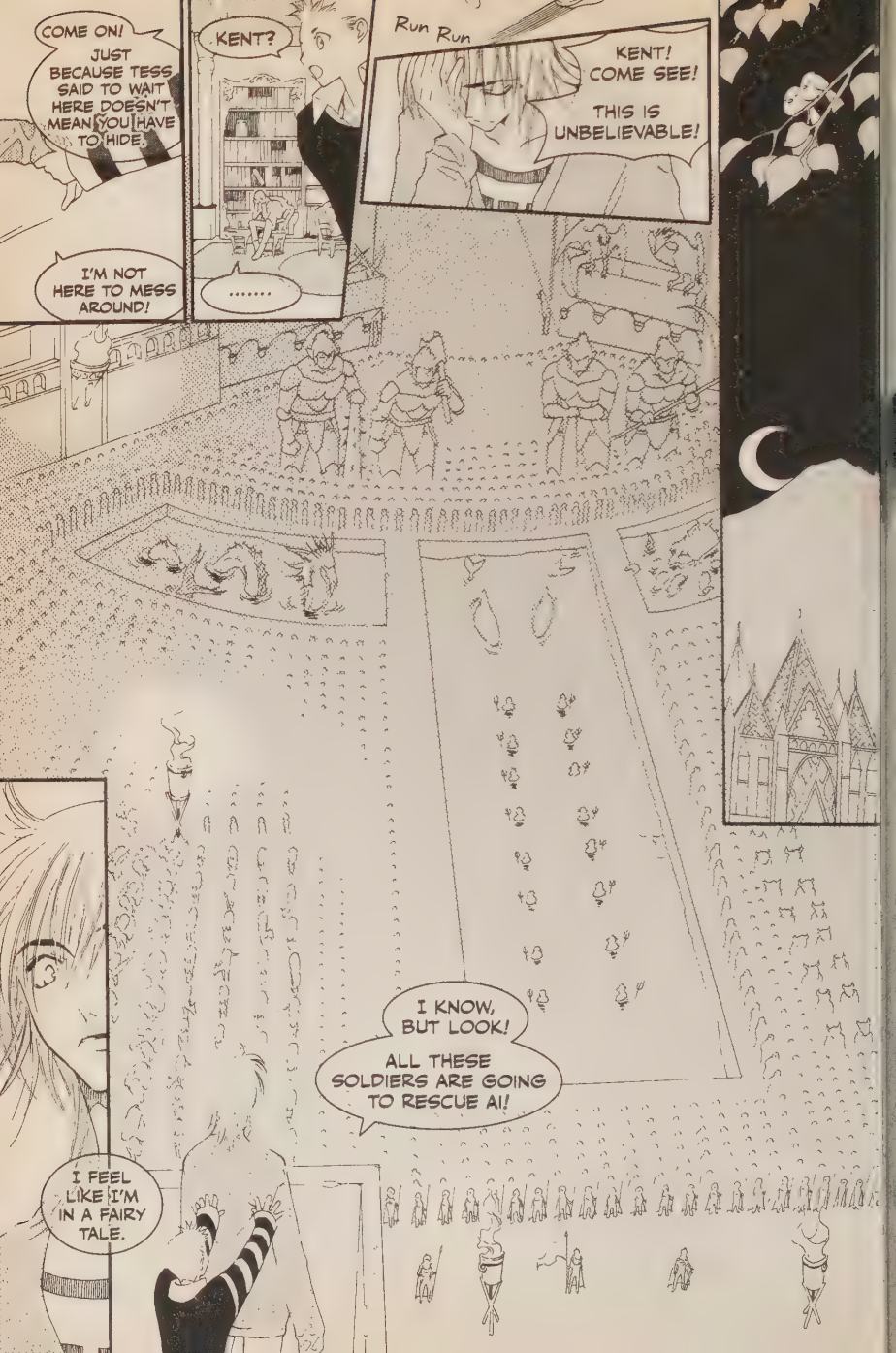
THAT VOICE...
KEMO?
KAZ. OUR RENDEZVOUS HAS CHANGED.
CHANGED HOW?
WE'RE MEETING THEM TONIGHT.


Yaaawwn...
BZZZT
HM?
CRACKLE
?!

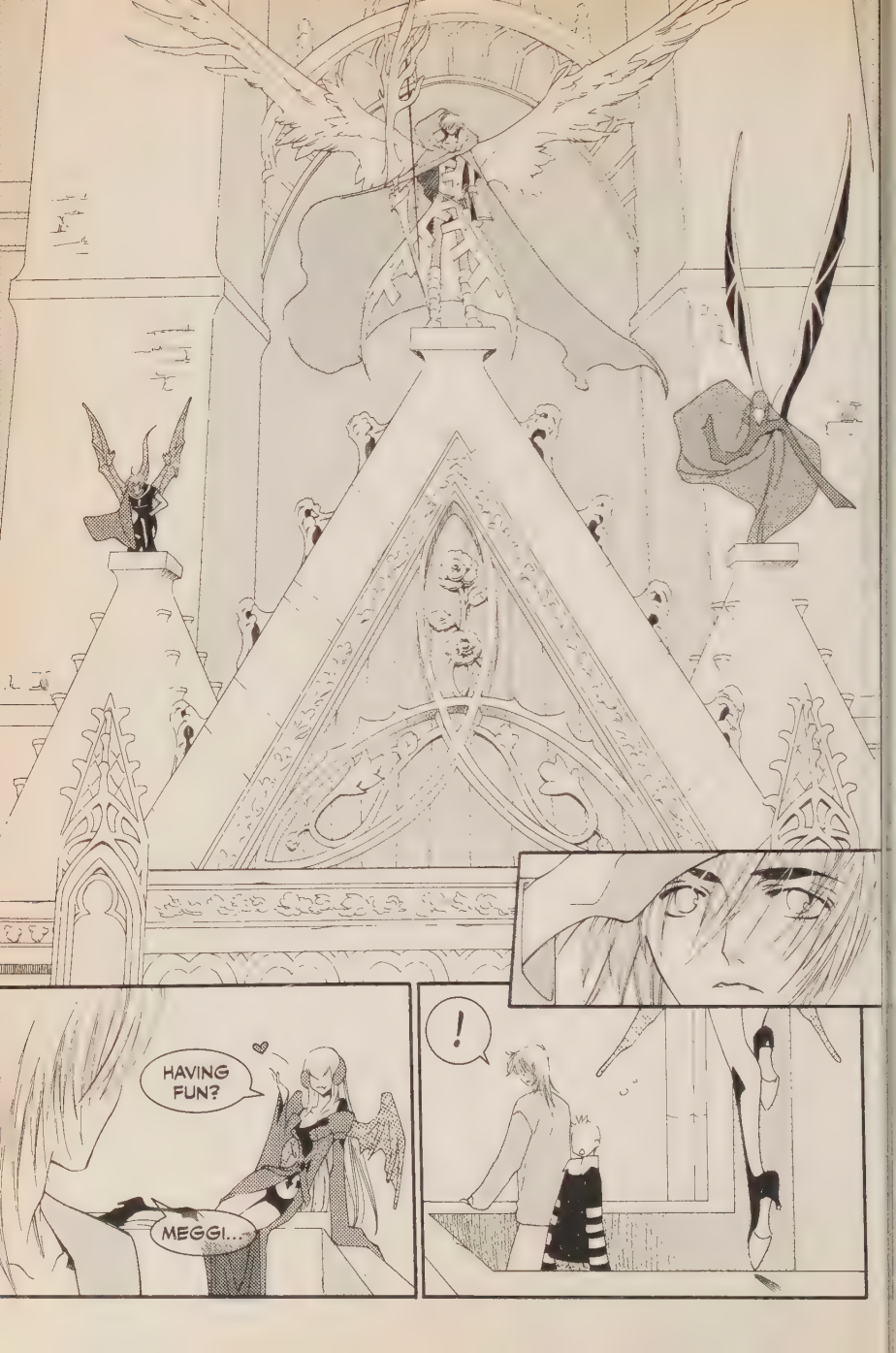
PREPARE YOURSELF.
FLAP


!!
Swoosh
WE BEG YOUR PARDON!
AH! IT'S THE FURIES!

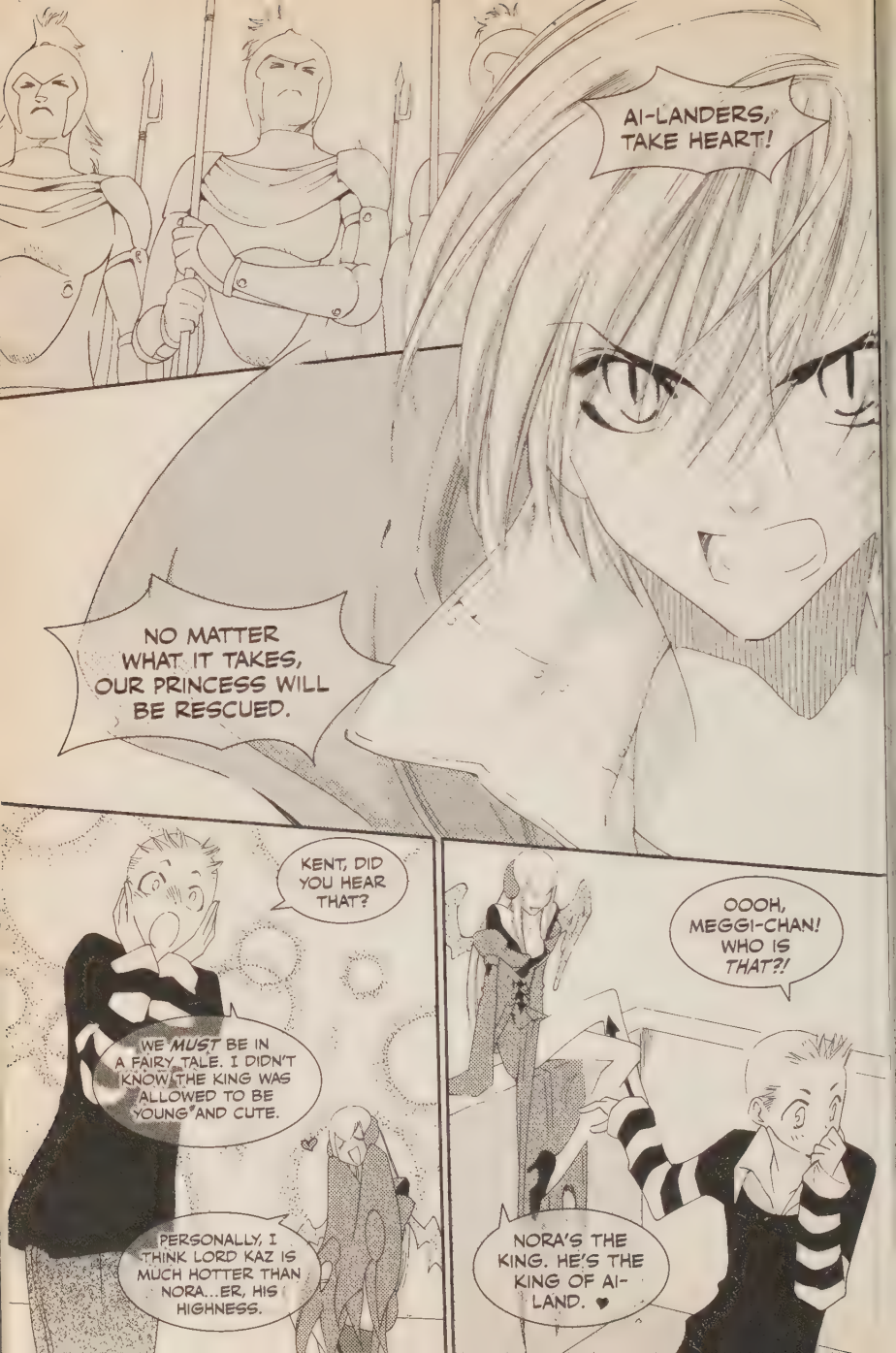

KYAA!
FWUMP
TCHAK!
!!
TCHAK!
!
GRAAAAH!

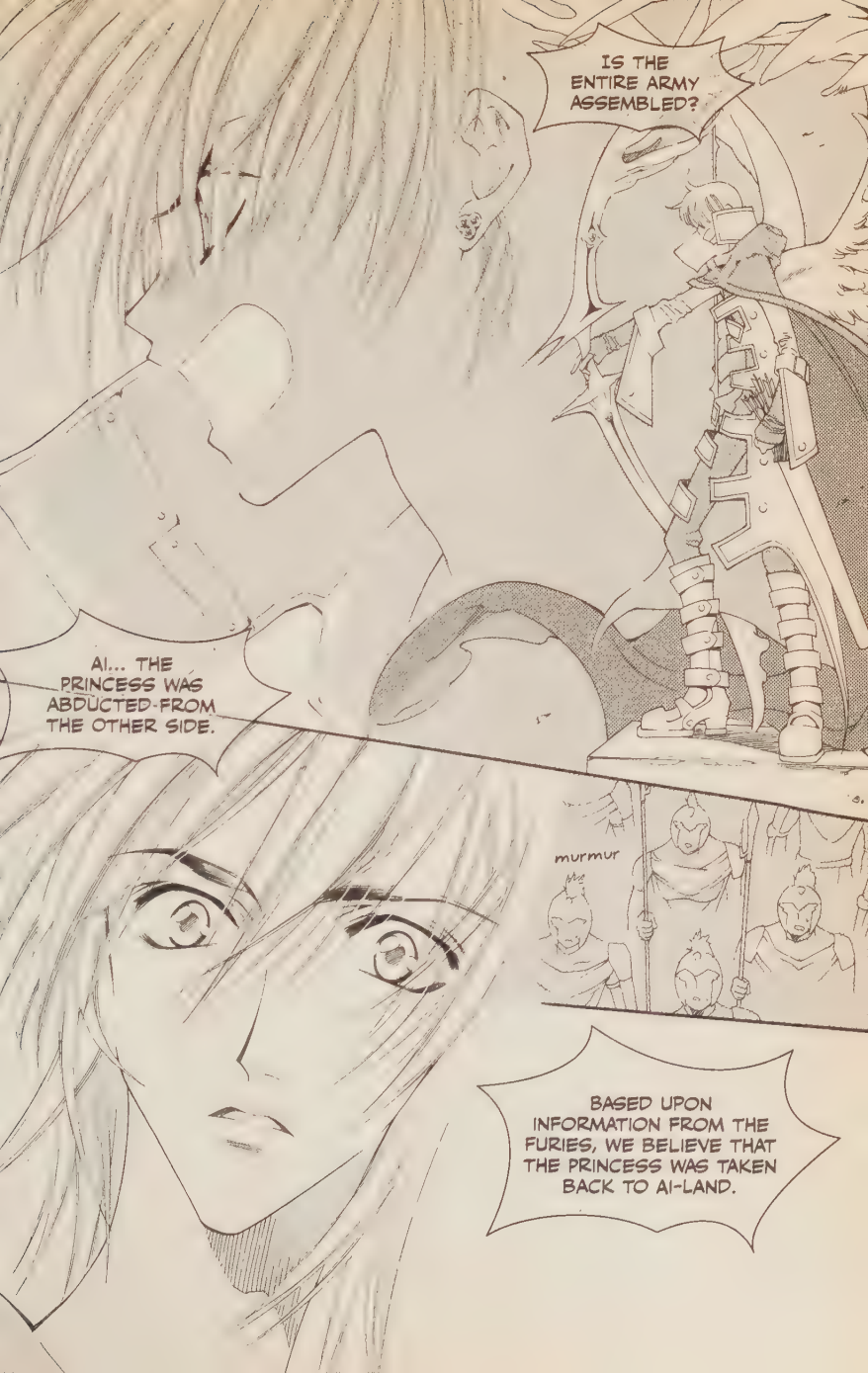

COME ON! JUST BECAUSE TESS SAID TO WAIT HERE DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO HIDE.
I'M NOT HERE TO MESS AROUND!
KENT?
.....
Run Run
KENT! COME SEE!
THIS IS UNBELIEVABLE!
I KNOW, BUT LOOK!
ALL THESE SOLDIERS ARE GOING TO RESCUE AI!
I FEEL LIKE I'M IN A FAIRY TALE.

Clench
MOBILIZE THE ARMY. TELL THE GENERAL TO AWAIT DISPATCH ORDERS.
THE KING IS... RESTING IN HIS CHAMBERS...
WASN'T THE PRINCESS WITH YOU?
WE--WE WERE CAUGHT BY SURPRISE, YOUR--YOUR LADYSHIPS WARPED IN SO SUDDENLY, AND--
ENOUGH. WE HAVE A STATE OF EMERGENCY.
WE NEED AUDIENCE WITH THE KING.
SO THIS IS...
AI-LAND...!


!
HAVING FUN?
MEGGI...

INCREDIBLE...
...THEY'RE ALL GOING AFTER AI?
TEN-HUT!
Tat
!


AI-LANDERS, TAKE HEART!
NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES, OUR PRINCESS WILL BE RESCUED.
KENT, DID YOU HEAR THAT?
WE *MUST* BE IN A FAIRY TALE. I DIDN'T KNOW THE KING WAS ALLOWED TO BE YOUNG AND CUTE.
PERSONALLY, I THINK LORD KAZ IS MUCH HOTTER THAN NORA...ER, HIS HIGHNESS.
OOOH, MEGGI-CHAN! WHO IS *THAT*?!
NORA'S THE KING. HE'S THE KING OF AI-LAND. ♥

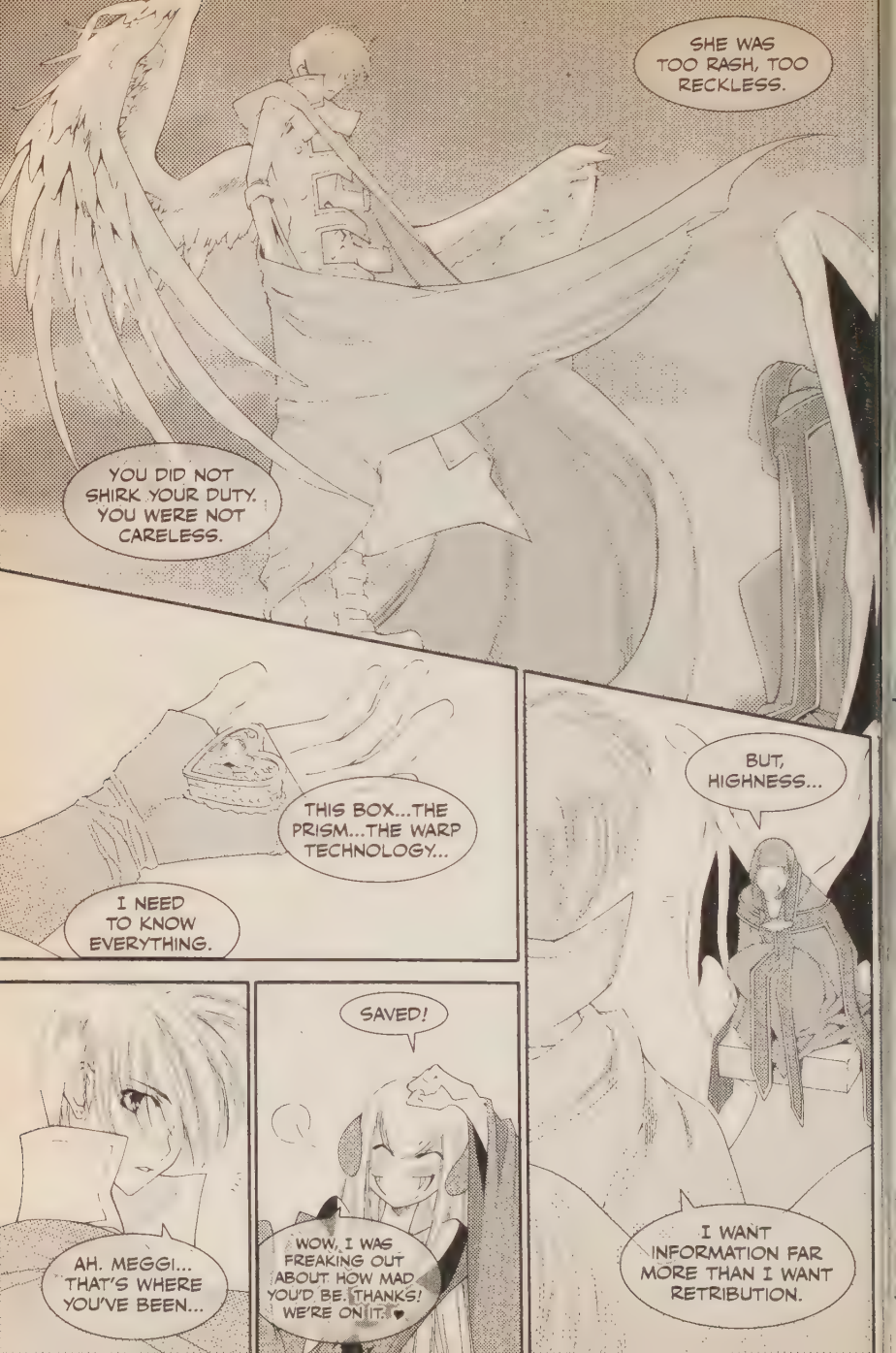

IS THE ENTIRE ARMY ASSEMBLED?
AI... THE PRINCESS WAS ABDUCTED FROM THE OTHER SIDE.
murmur
BASED UPON INFORMATION FROM THE FURIES, WE BELIEVE THAT THE PRINCESS WAS TAKEN BACK TO AI-LAND.

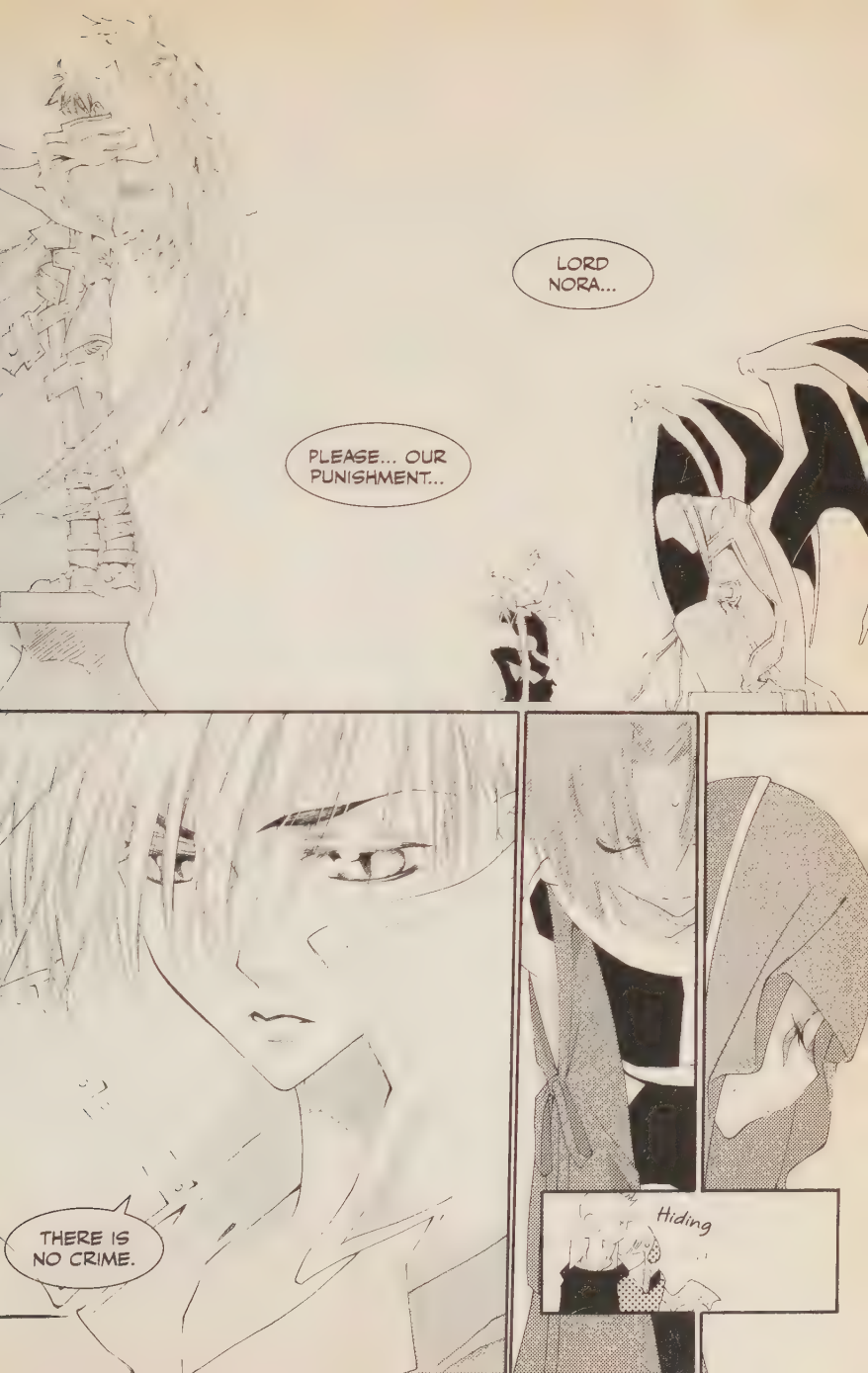
FWOOSH
FLAP
KYAAA!
THAT'S THE FIRST SQUAD TAKING OFF.
THE FIRST WAVE WILL SEARCH FROM THE AIR. ♪
Flap
Flap
WHOA!
GROUND TROOPS, SQUADS ONE THROUGH FOUR...
...FAN OUT IN PURSUIT OF ALIEN FORMS. YOU CAN SNIFF OUT THE CULPRITS FROM THE OTHER SIDE.

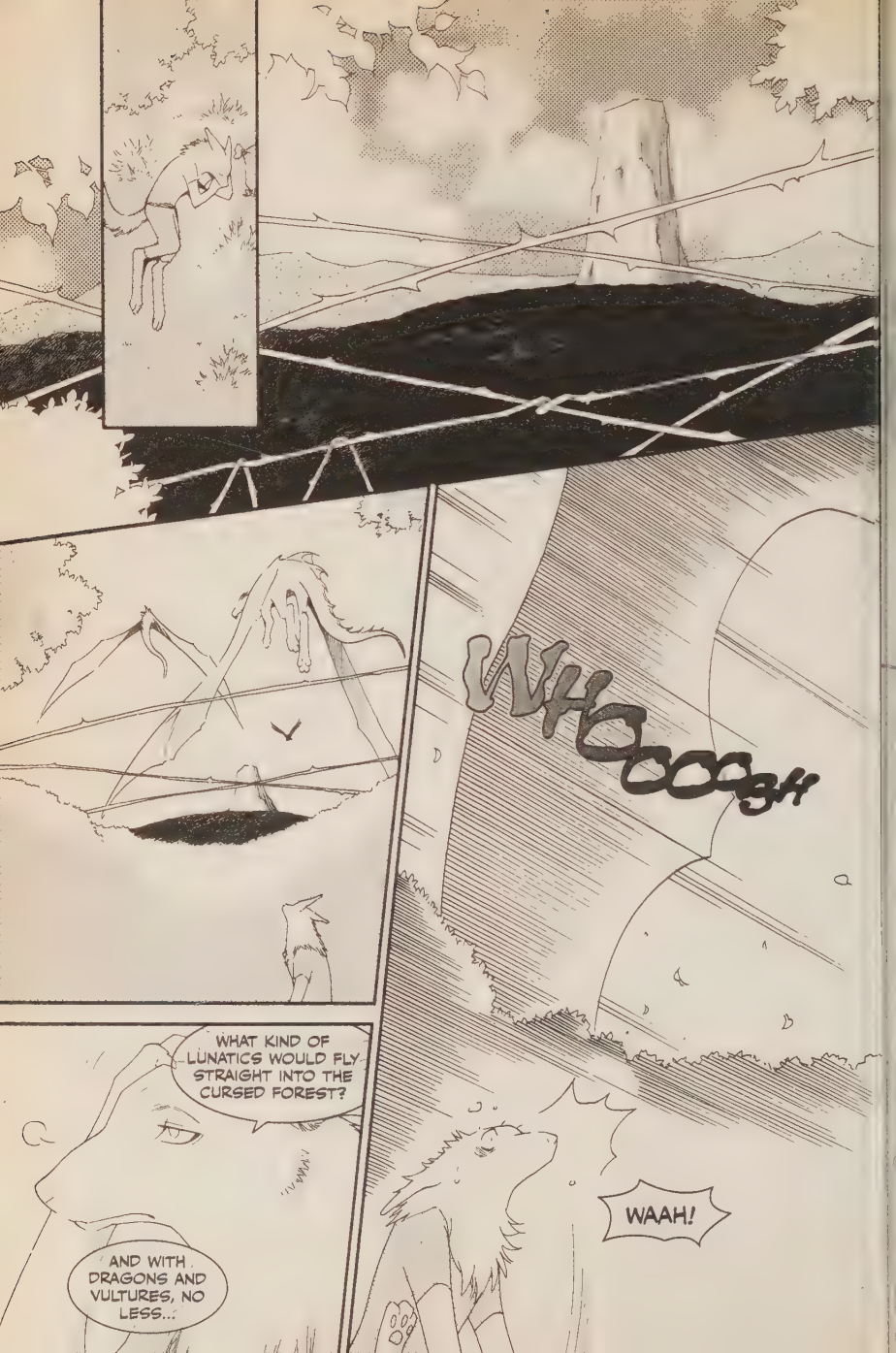
YUP.
HE'S KING?
BUT NEITHER OF THEM KNEW ABOUT THAT UNTIL RECENTLY.
SO... HE'S RELATED TO AI?
BEFORE THAT...
...THEY WERE *AWFULLY* CLOSE, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. ♥

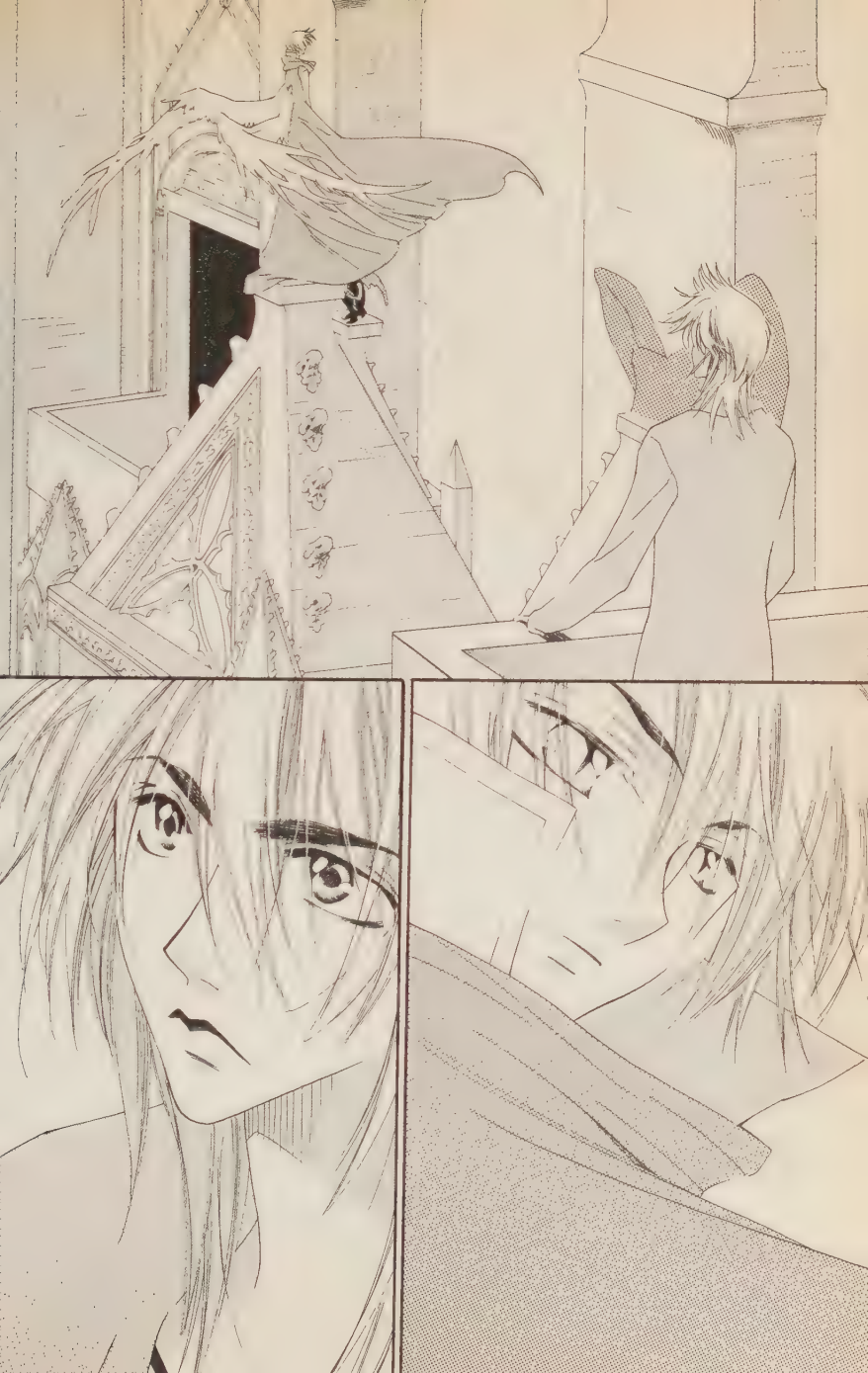
KENT...
WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO, JUST SIT HERE?
I HAVE TO FIND AI!

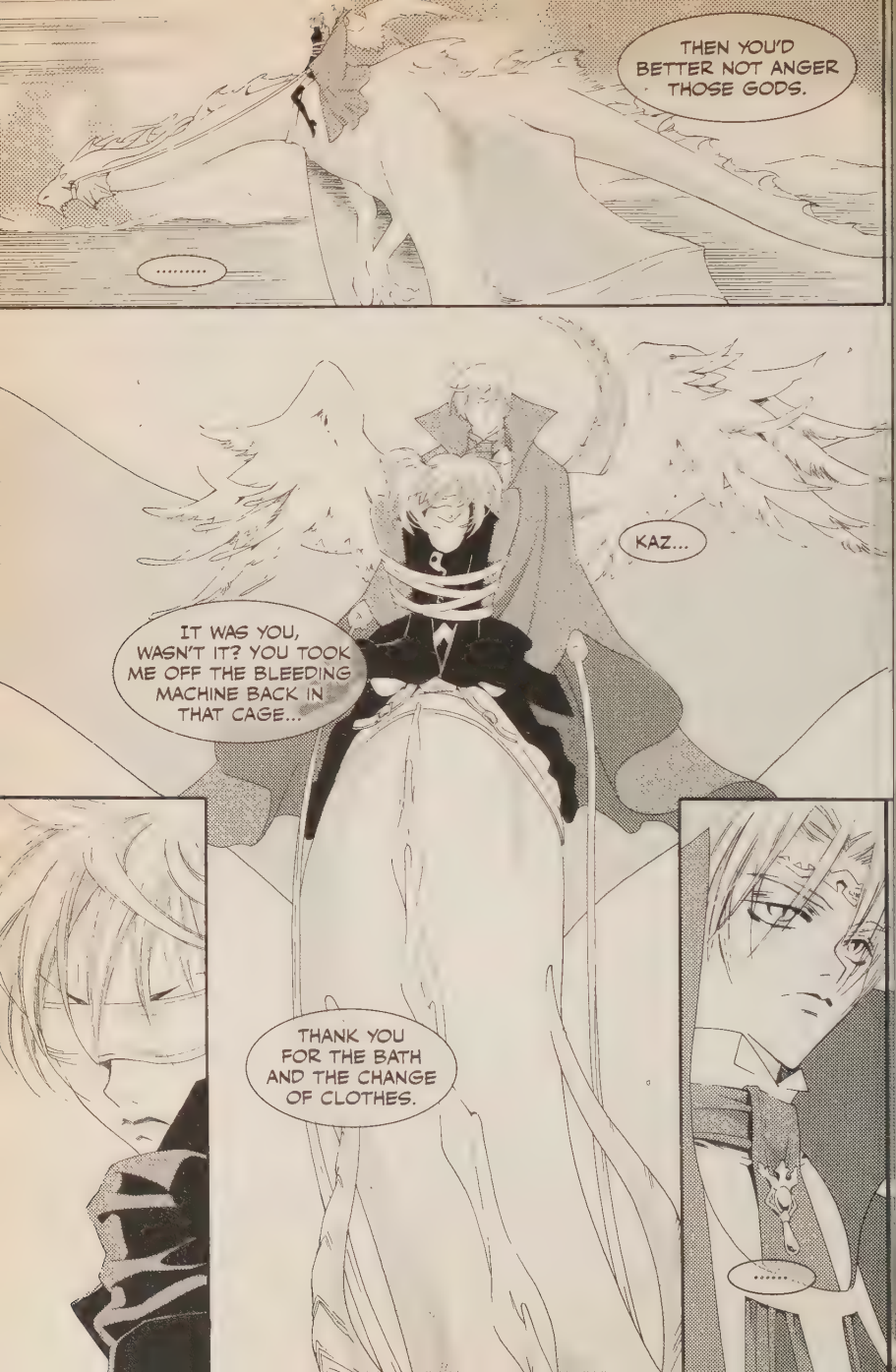
MEGGI!
LET ME GO, TOO!
REMAINING GROUND TROOPS...FOLLOW ANY SCENT OR...TRAIL OF ROYAL BLOOD.
AND YOURS IS DEPLETED. YOU'RE PUSHING YOURSELF TOO HARD.
AND THAT'S ON TOP OF THE TANK WITHDRAWAL.
CONSERVE MY STRENGTH?!
YOU MEAN SIT HERE AND DO NOTHING?
I CAN READ PEOPLE'S AURAS, ROCK STAR.
HMM...
IT'S NOT EXACTLY UP TO ME...
BUT MAYBE YOU SHOULD CONSERVE YOUR STRENGTH UNTIL WE CAN ZERO IN ON THE PRINCESS?

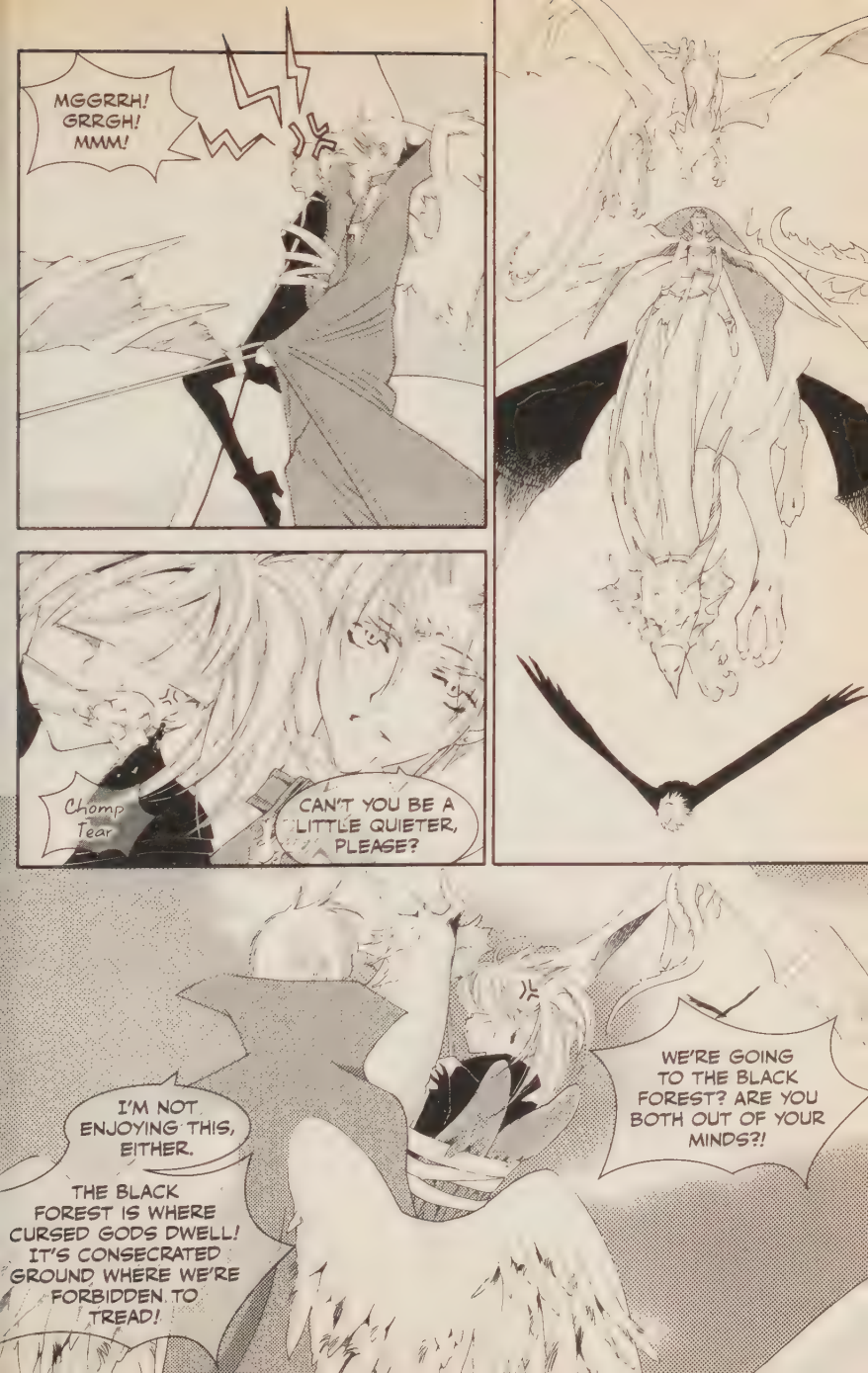

SHE WAS TOO RASH, TOO RECKLESS.
YOU DID NOT SHIRK YOUR DUTY. YOU WERE NOT CARELESS.
THIS BOX...THE PRISM...THE WARP TECHNOLOGY...
I NEED TO KNOW EVERYTHING.
BUT, HIGHNESS...
I WANT INFORMATION FAR MORE THAN I WANT RETRIBUTION.
SAVED!
WOW, I WAS FREAKING OUT ABOUT HOW MAD YOU'D BE. THANKS! WE'RE ON IT. ♥
AH. MEGGI... THAT'S WHERE YOU'VE BEEN...

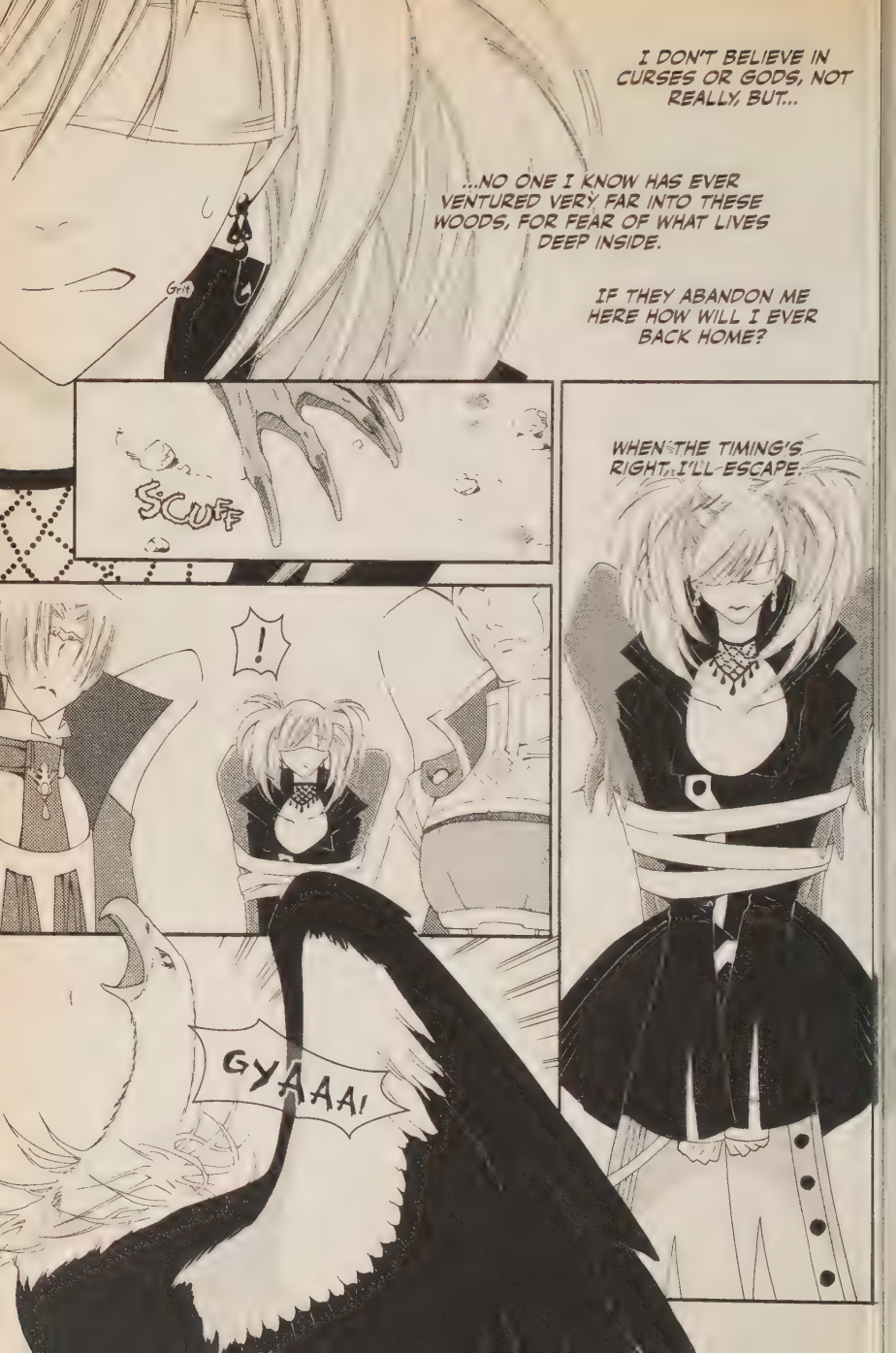

LORD NORA...
PLEASE... OUR PUNISHMENT...
THERE IS NO CRIME.
Hiding


WHAT KIND OF LUNATICS WOULD FLY STRAIGHT INTO THE CURSED FOREST?
AND WITH DRAGONS AND VULTURES, NO LESS...
WAAH!

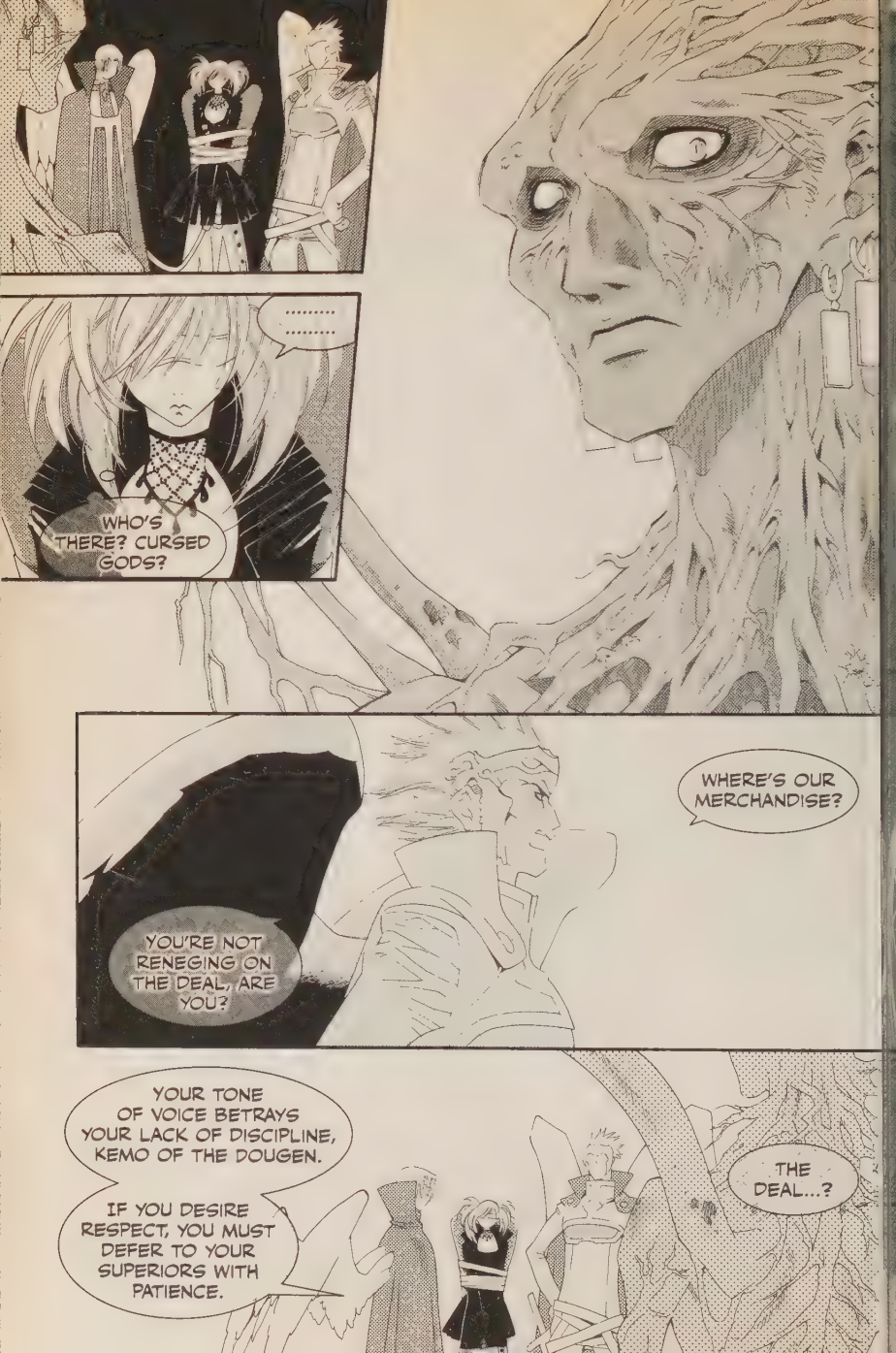


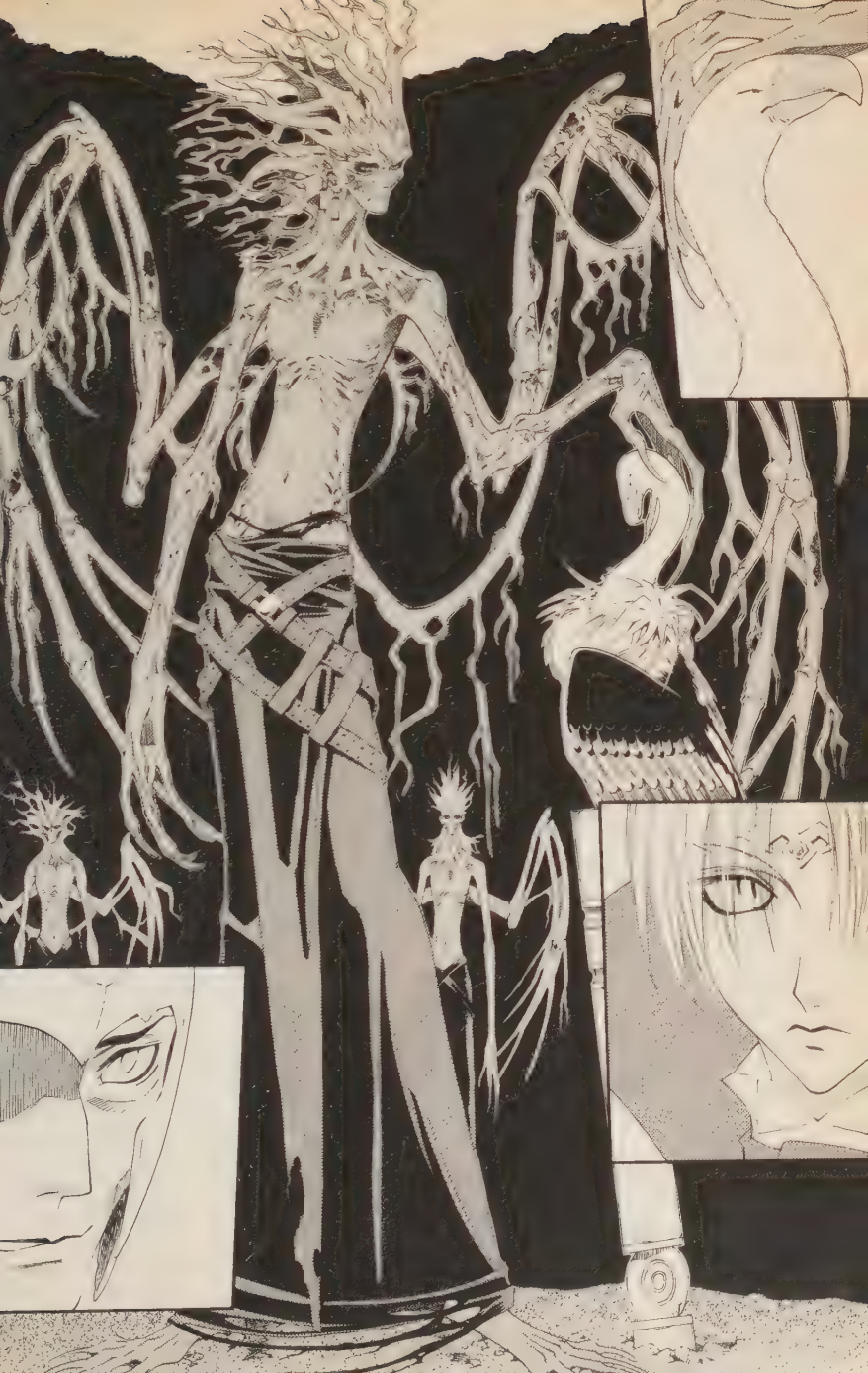

THEN YOU'D BETTER NOT ANGER THOSE GODS.
.....
KAZ...
IT WAS YOU, WASN'T IT? YOU TOOK ME OFF THE BLEEDING MACHINE BACK IN THAT CAGE...
THANK YOU FOR THE BATH AND THE CHANGE OF CLOTHES.
.....

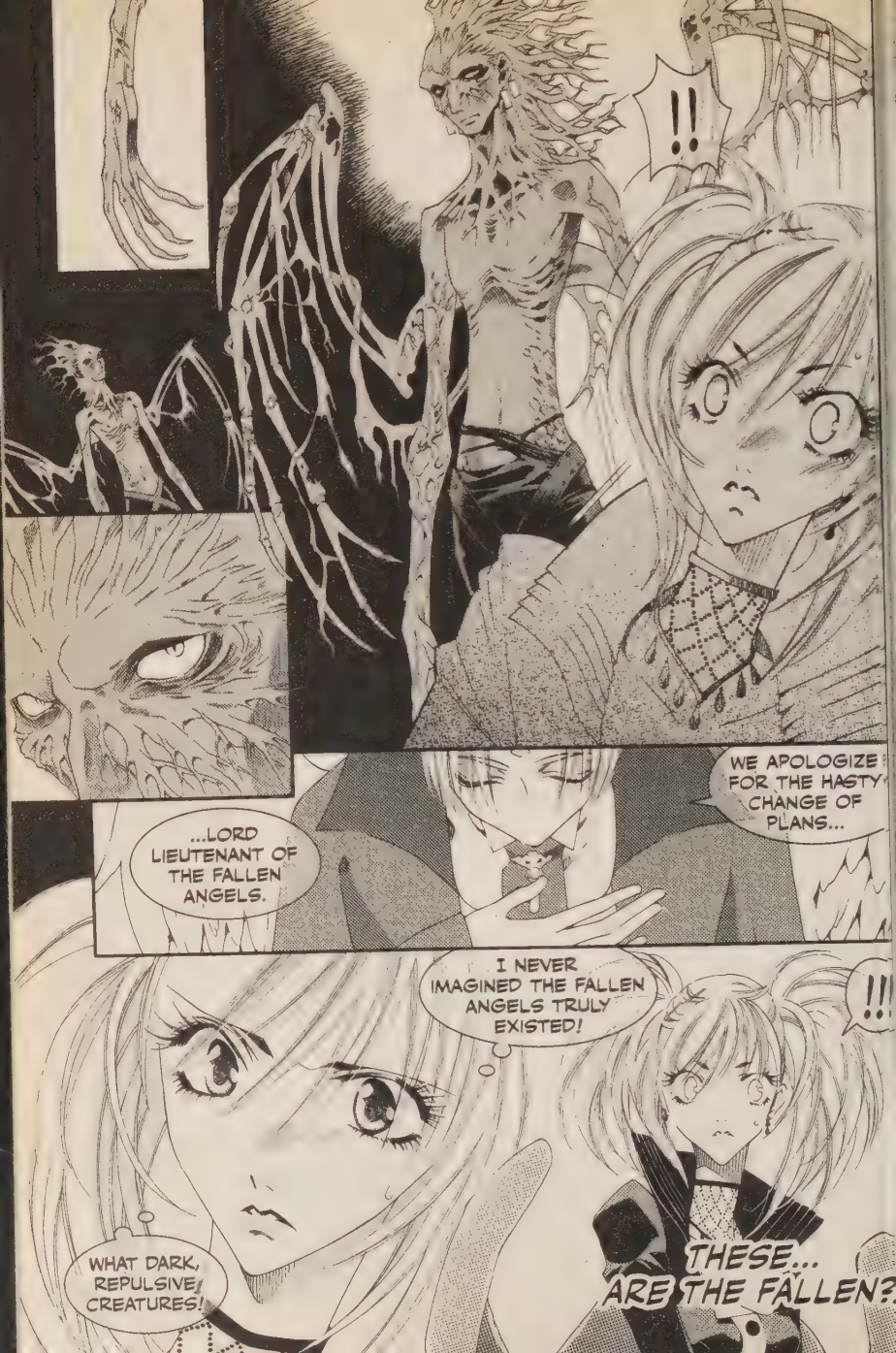

MGGRRH! GRRGH! MMM!
Chomp Tear
CAN'T YOU BE A LITTLE QUIETER, PLEASE?
WE'RE GOING TO THE BLACK FOREST? ARE YOU BOTH OUT OF YOUR MINDS?!
I'M NOT ENJOYING THIS, EITHER.
THE BLACK FOREST IS WHERE CURSED GODS DWELL! IT'S CONSECRATED GROUND WHERE WE'RE FORBIDDEN TO TREAD!


I DON'T BELIEVE IN CURSES OR GODS, NOT REALLY, BUT...
...NO ONE I KNOW HAS EVER VENTURED VERY FAR INTO THESE WOODS, FOR FEAR OF WHAT LIVES DEEP INSIDE.
IF THEY ABANDON ME HERE HOW WILL I EVER BACK HOME?
Grit
SCUFF
!
WHEN THE TIMING'S RIGHT, I'LL ESCAPE.
GYAAA!

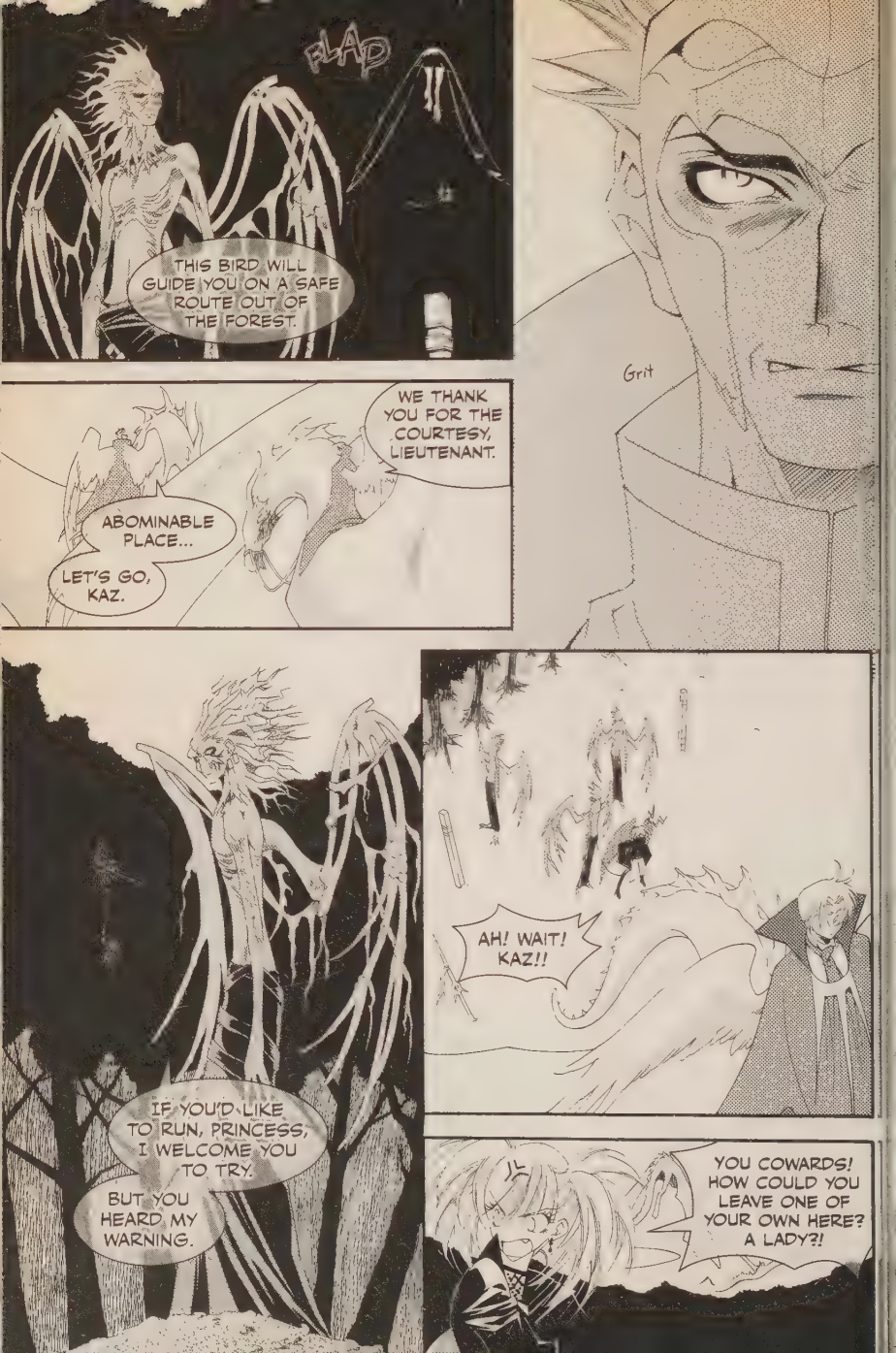
BUT IF YOU HELPED ME THEN, WHY TURN ON ME NOW?
...ARE WE HERE? IS THIS THE BLACK FOREST?
IT'S SO COLD...

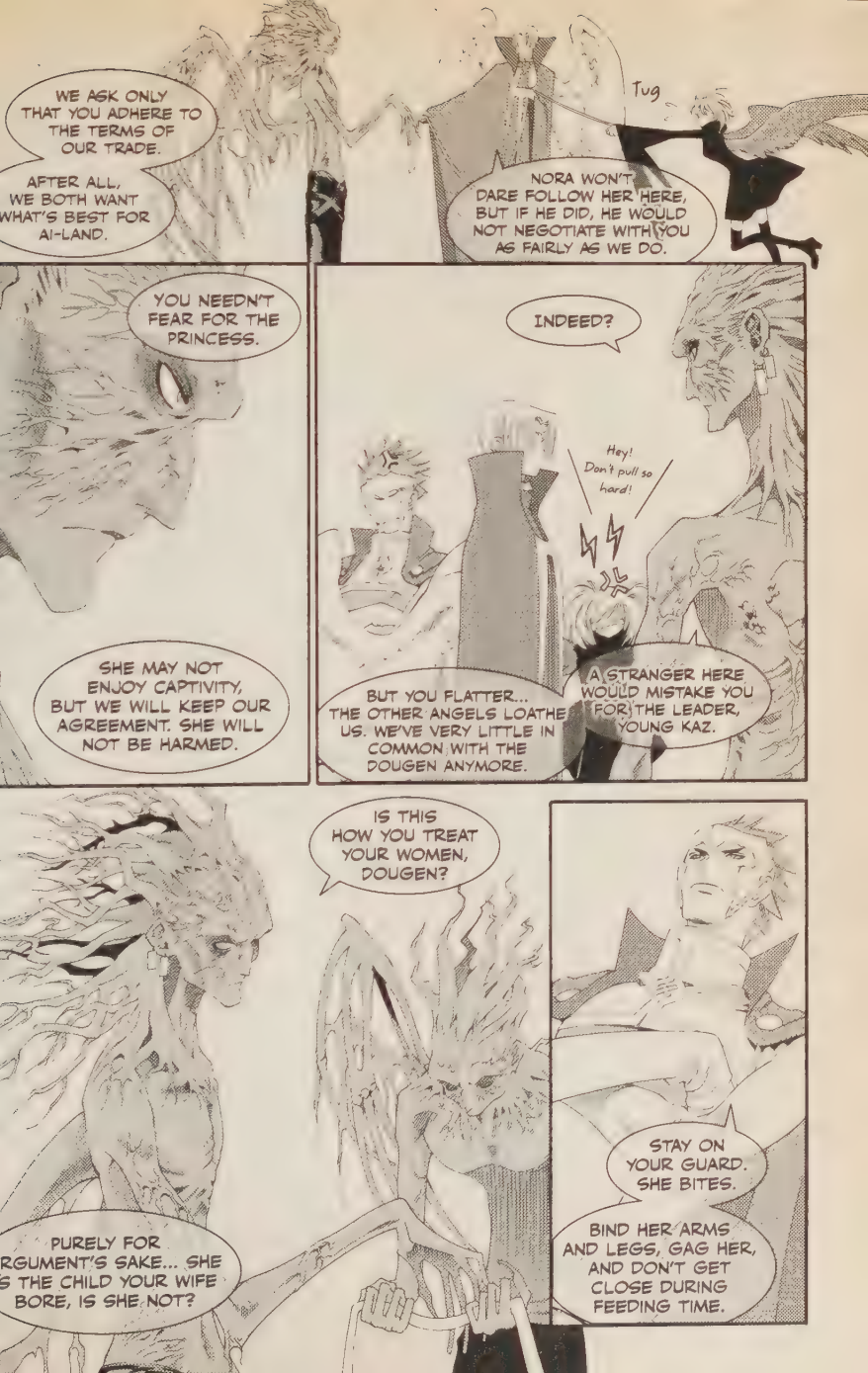

.....
.....
WHO'S THERE? CURSED GODS?
WHERE'S OUR MERCHANDISE?
YOU'RE NOT RENEGING ON THE DEAL, ARE YOU?
YOUR TONE OF VOICE BETRAYS YOUR LACK OF DISCIPLINE, KEMO OF THE DOUGEN.
IF YOU DESIRE RESPECT, YOU MUST DEFER TO YOUR SUPERIORS WITH PATIENCE.
THE DEAL...?

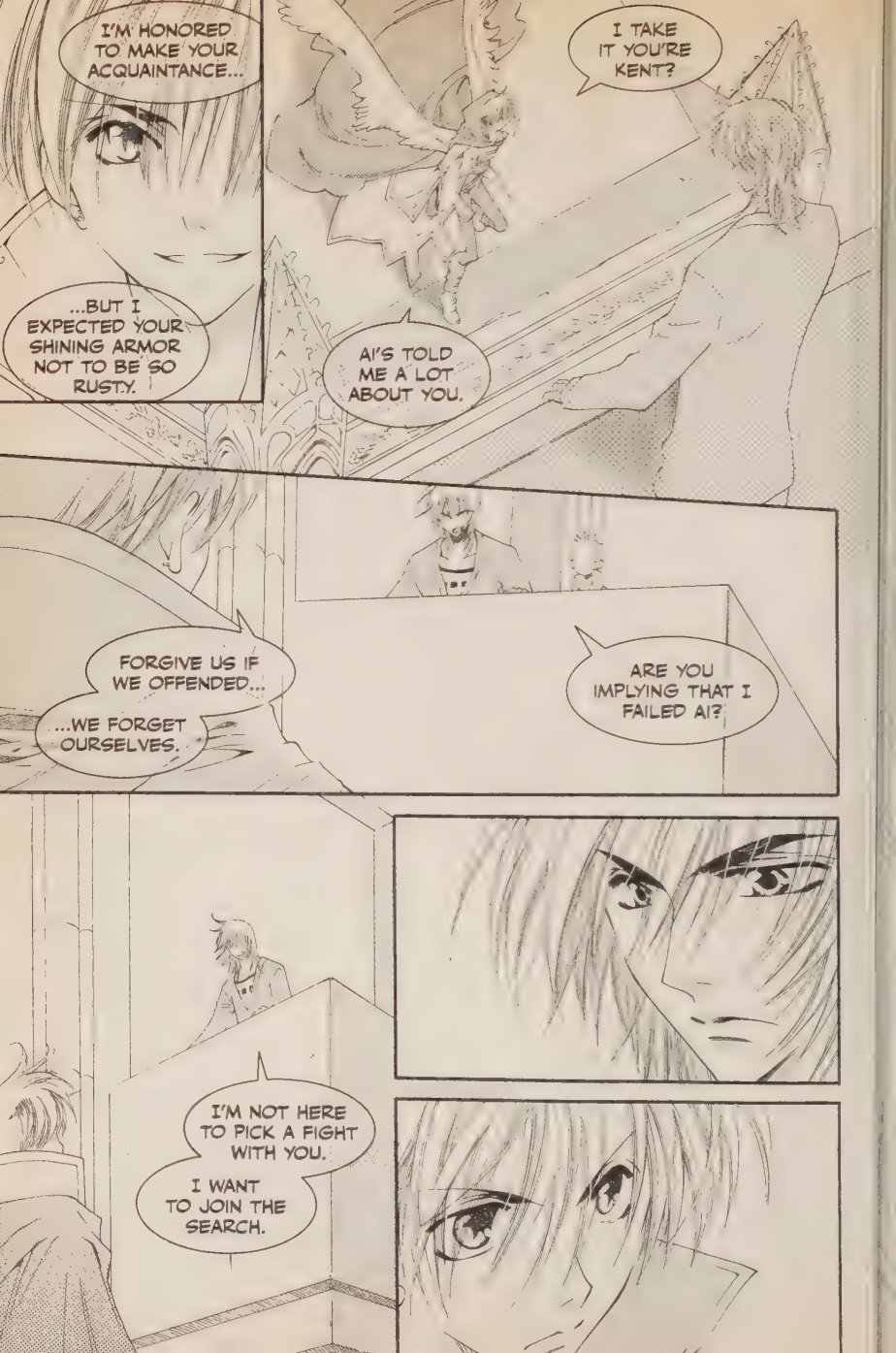



!!
WE APOLOGIZE FOR THE HASTY CHANGE OF PLANS...
...LORD LIEUTENANT OF THE FALLEN ANGELS.
I NEVER IMAGINED THE FALLEN ANGELS TRULY EXISTED!
!!!
THESE... ARE THE FALLEN?
WHAT DARK, REPULSIVE CREATURES!

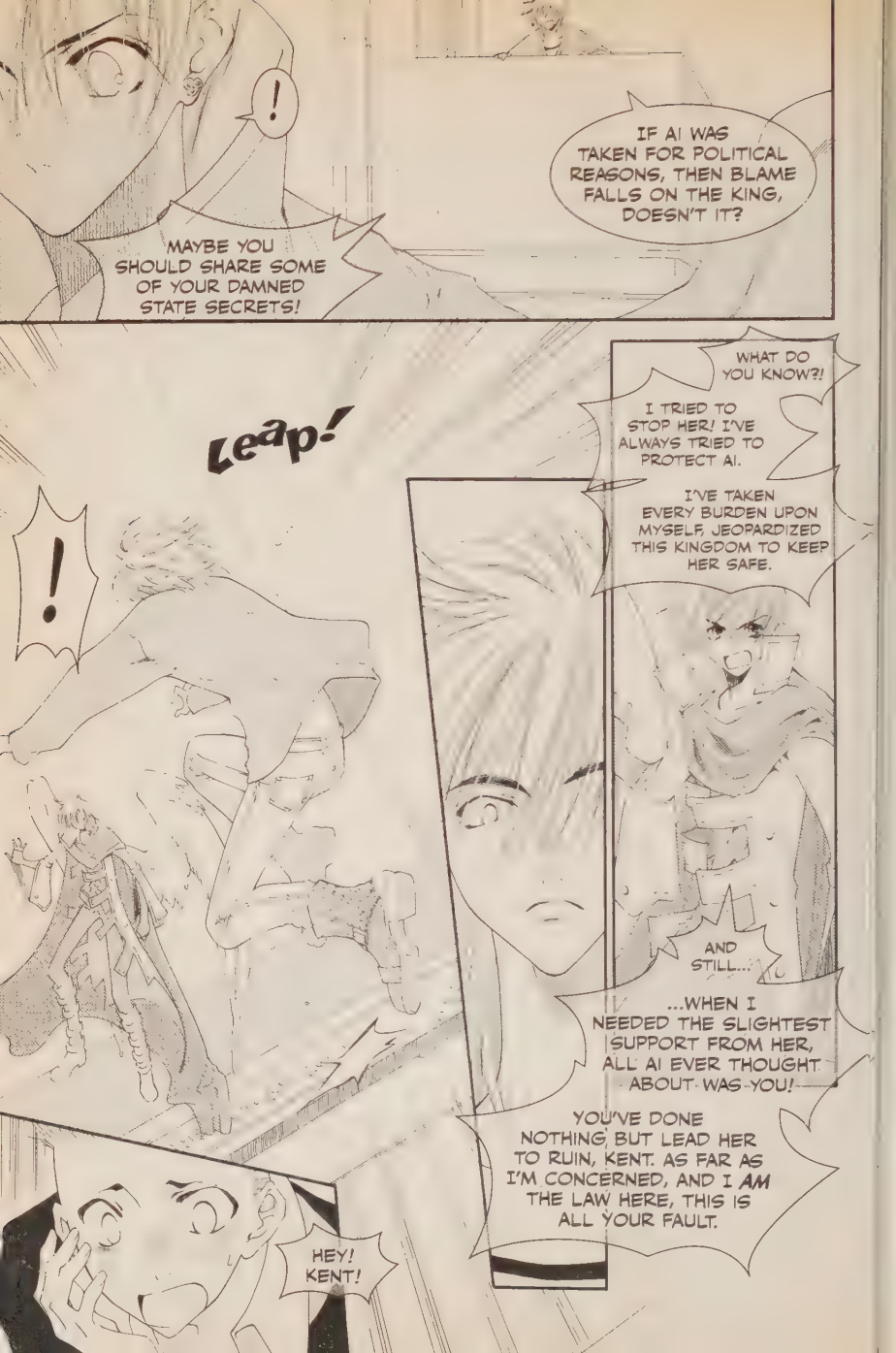
THE UNDEAD ARE SO DAMNED CRANKY.
WHO'S KEMO TALKING TO? WHAT ARE THEY BARGAINING ABOUT?
WE'LL TAKE THE PRINCESS FROM HERE.
ONCE WE HAVE COLLECTED OUR PRIZE, THE ITEM WILL BE PREPARED FOR YOU.
!

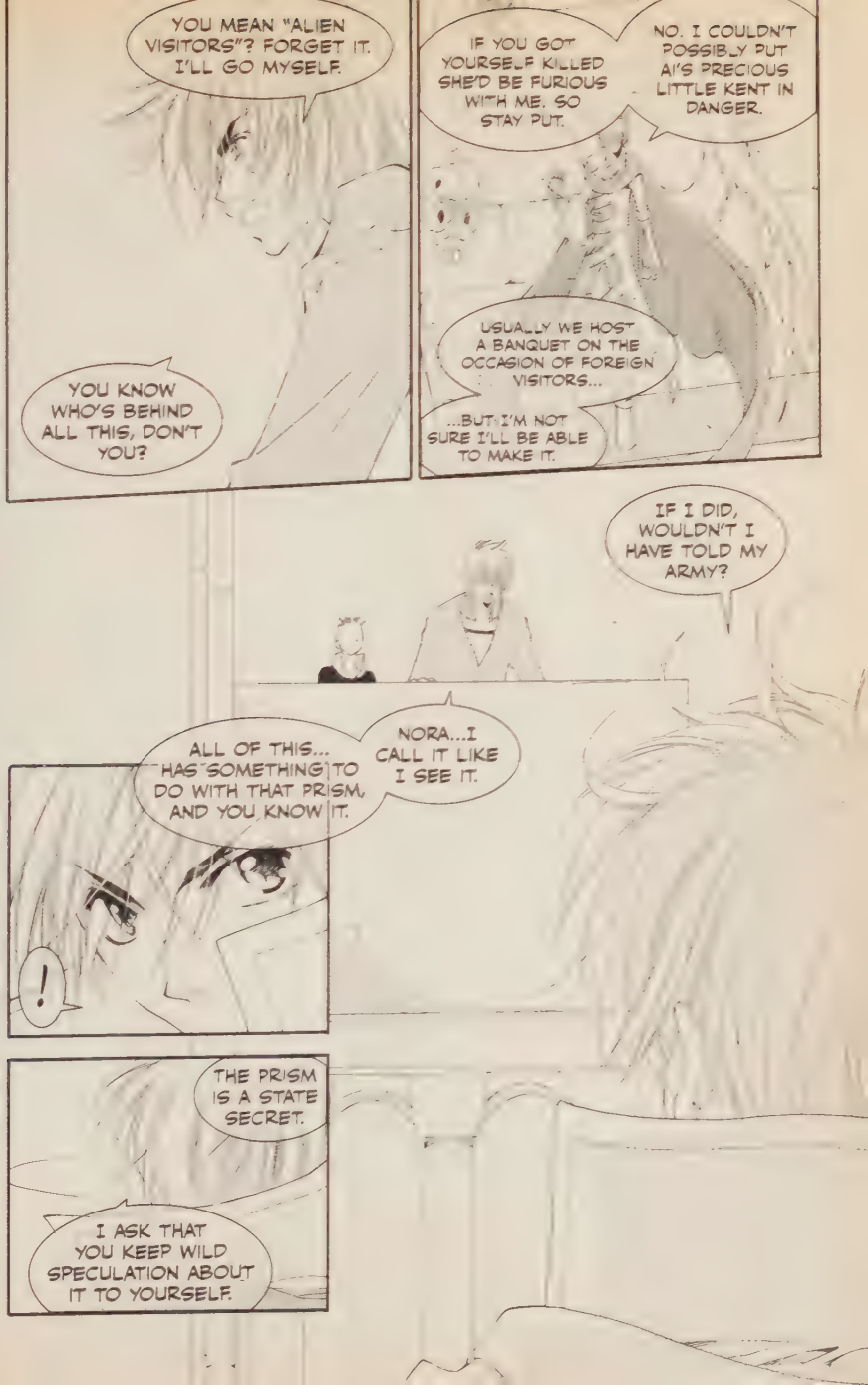

FLAP
THIS BIRD WILL GUIDE YOU ON A SAFE ROUTE OUT OF THE FOREST.
Grit
WE THANK YOU FOR THE COURTESY, LIEUTENANT.
ABOMINABLE PLACE...
LET'S GO, KAZ.
AH! WAIT! KAZ!!
IF YOU'D LIKE TO RUN, PRINCESS, I WELCOME YOU TO TRY.
BUT YOU HEARD MY WARNING.
YOU COWARDS! HOW COULD YOU LEAVE ONE OF YOUR OWN HERE? A LADY?!


WE ASK ONLY THAT YOU ADHERE TO THE TERMS OF OUR TRADE.
AFTER ALL, WE BOTH WANT WHAT'S BEST FOR AI-LAND.
Tug
NORA WON'T DARE FOLLOW HER HERE, BUT IF HE DID, HE WOULD NOT NEGOTIATE WITH YOU AS FAIRLY AS WE DO.
YOU NEEDN'T FEAR FOR THE PRINCESS.
INDEED?
Hey! Don't pull so hard!
SHE MAY NOT ENJOY CAPTIVITY, BUT WE WILL KEEP OUR AGREEMENT. SHE WILL NOT BE HARMED.
BUT YOU FLATTER... THE OTHER ANGELS LOATHE US. WE'VE VERY LITTLE IN COMMON WITH THE DOUGEN ANYMORE.
A STRANGER HERE WOULD MISTAKE YOU FOR THE LEADER, YOUNG KAZ.
IS THIS HOW YOU TREAT YOUR WOMEN, DOUGEN?
PURELY FOR RGUMENT'S SAKE... SHE S THE CHILD YOUR WIFE BORE, IS SHE NOT?
STAY ON YOUR GUARD. SHE BITES.
BIND HER ARMS AND LEGS, GAG HER, AND DON'T GET CLOSE DURING FEEDING TIME.

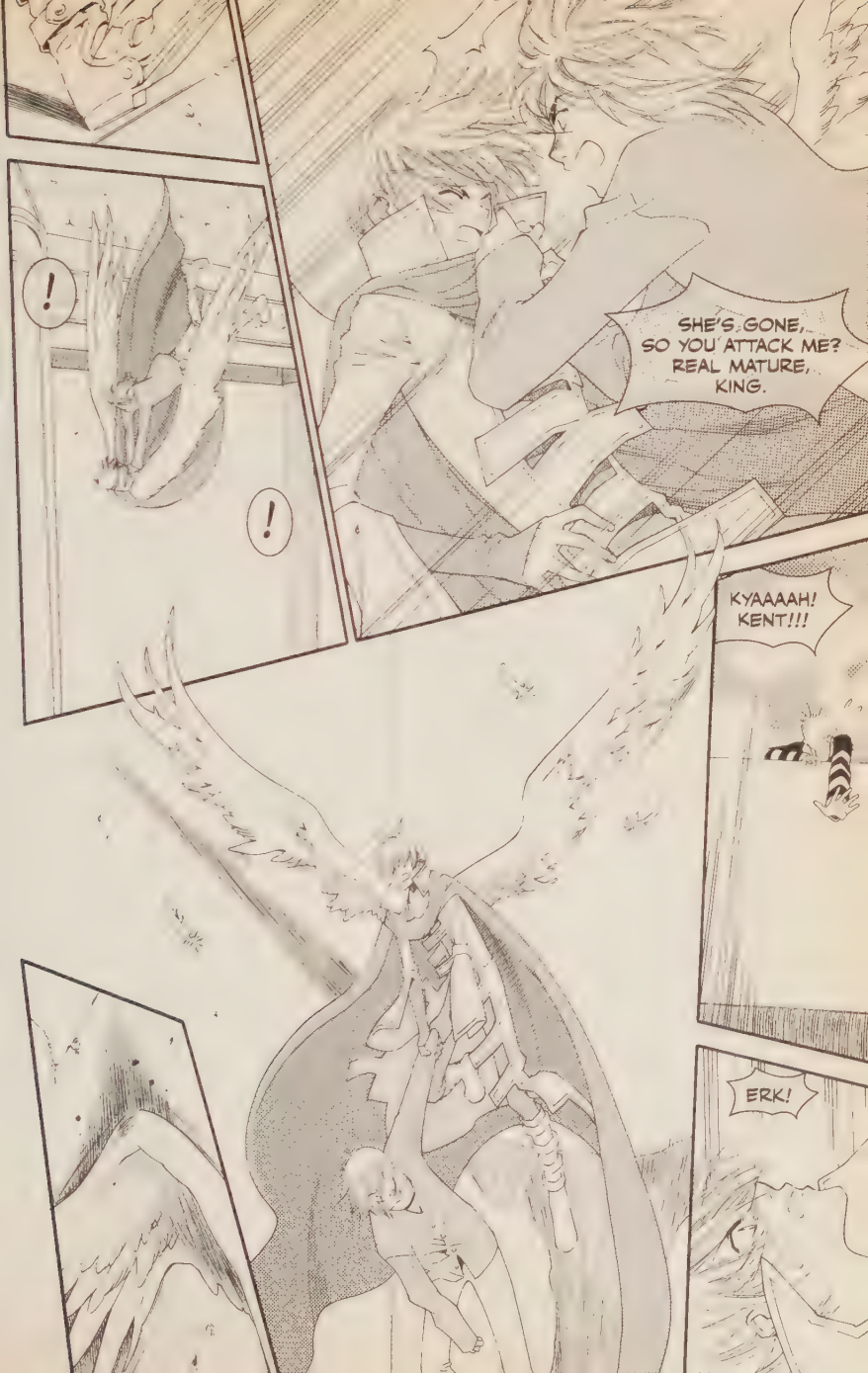

I'M HONORED TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE...
...BUT I EXPECTED YOUR SHINING ARMOR NOT TO BE SO RUSTY.
I TAKE IT YOU'RE KENT?
AI'S TOLD ME A LOT ABOUT YOU.
FORGIVE US IF WE OFFENDED...
...WE FORGET OURSELVES.
ARE YOU IMPLYING THAT I FAILED AI?
I'M NOT HERE TO PICK A FIGHT WITH YOU.
I WANT TO JOIN THE SEARCH.

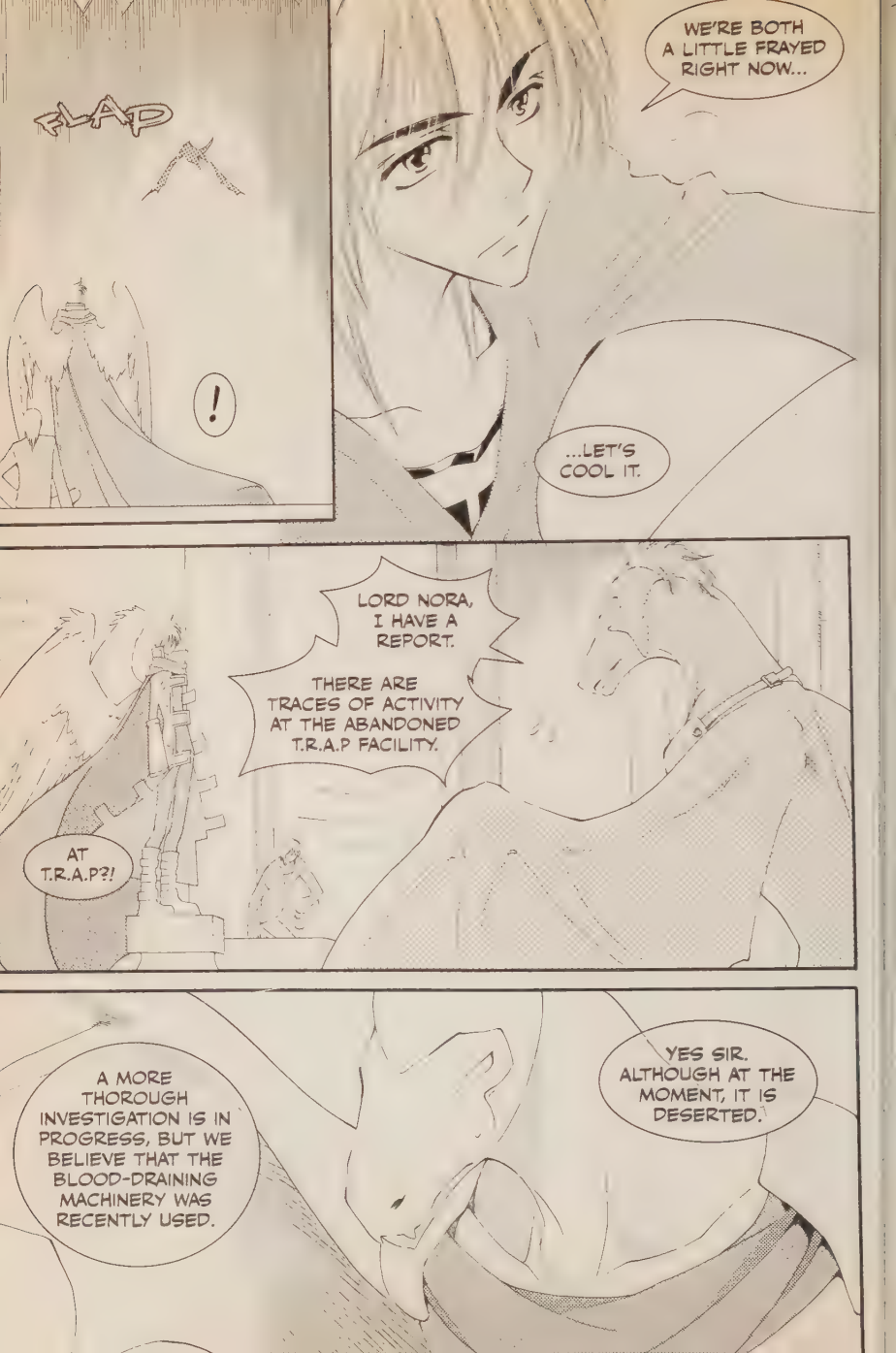
YOUR WINGS AREN'T BOUND. WHY NOT JUST FLY AWAY SOMEWHERE?
WE COULDN'T POSSIBLY FOLLOW YOU WITH THESE WINGS OF BONE.
IF YOU'D LIKE TO LIVE, THIS WAY.
Tug
COME ON.
BUT WITHOUT A GUIDE, YOU WOULD QUICKLY BECOME BRITTLE PREY TO ONE OF THE DARK BEASTS OF THE FOREST.
HOWWWL!
GYAAAH!

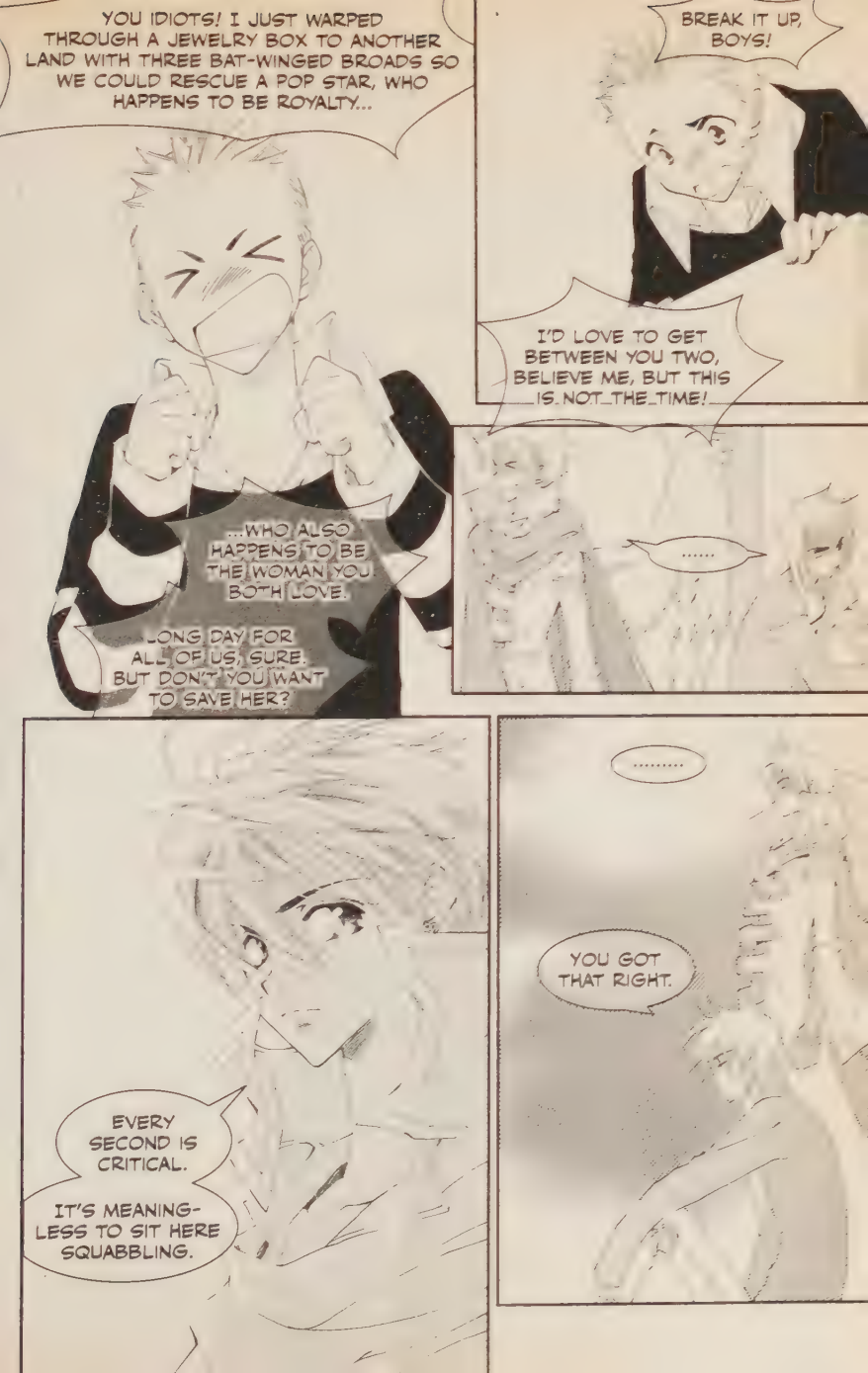

!
MAYBE YOU SHOULD SHARE SOME OF YOUR DAMNED STATE SECRETS!
IF AI WAS TAKEN FOR POLITICAL REASONS, THEN BLAME FALLS ON THE KING, DOESN'T IT?
WHAT DO YOU KNOW?!
I TRIED TO STOP HER! I'VE ALWAYS TRIED TO PROTECT AI.
I'VE TAKEN EVERY BURDEN UPON MYSELF, JEOPARDIZED THIS KINGDOM TO KEEP HER SAFE.
AND STILL...
...WHEN I NEEDED THE SLIGHTEST SUPPORT FROM HER, ALL AI EVER THOUGHT ABOUT WAS YOU!
YOU'VE DONE NOTHING BUT LEAD HER TO RUIN, KENT. AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, AND I AM THE LAW HERE, THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT.
Leap!
!
HEY! KENT!


YOU MEAN "ALIEN VISITORS"? FORGET IT. I'LL GO MYSELF.
YOU KNOW WHO'S BEHIND ALL THIS, DON'T YOU?
IF YOU GOT YOURSELF KILLED SHE'D BE FURIOUS WITH ME. SO STAY PUT.
NO. I COULDN'T POSSIBLY PUT AI'S PRECIOUS LITTLE KENT IN DANGER.
USUALLY WE HOST A BANQUET ON THE OCCASION OF FOREIGN VISITORS...
...BUT I'M NOT SURE I'LL BE ABLE TO MAKE IT.
IF I DID, WOULDN'T I HAVE TOLD MY ARMY?
ALL OF THIS... HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THAT PRISM, AND YOU KNOW IT.
NORA...I CALL IT LIKE I SEE IT.
!
THE PRISM IS A STATE SECRET.
I ASK THAT YOU KEEP WILD SPECULATION ABOUT IT TO YOURSELF.

Drip
...TANK...
Tap
HEY! ARE YOU OKAY?!
HIKARU...
...OUR BLOOD ISN'T SOME TOOL FOR YOUR PLEASURE!
AND DIRECT CONTACT WITH IT IS AS GOOD AS DEATH FOR HUMANS. BUT BE MY GUEST, KENT.


!
!
SHE'S GONE, SO YOU ATTACK ME? REAL MATURE, KING.
KYAAAAH! KENT!!!
ERK!

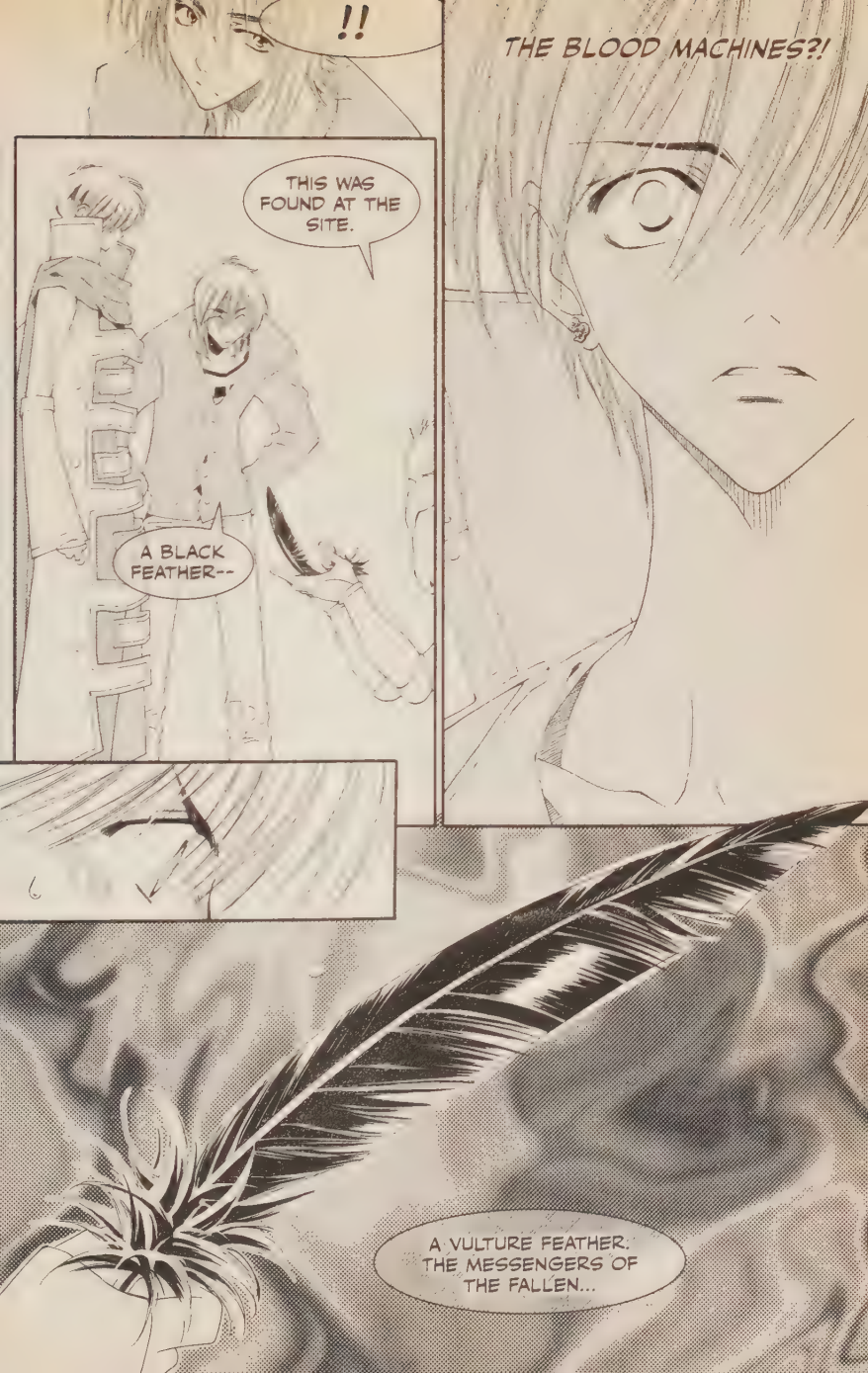

FLAP
!
WE'RE BOTH A LITTLE FRAYED RIGHT NOW...
...LET'S COOL IT.
LORD NORA, I HAVE A REPORT.
THERE ARE TRACES OF ACTIVITY AT THE ABANDONED T.R.A.P FACILITY.
AT T.R.A.P?!
A MORE THOROUGH INVESTIGATION IS IN PROGRESS, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT THE BLOOD-DRAINING MACHINERY WAS RECENTLY USED.
YES SIR. ALTHOUGH AT THE MOMENT, IT IS DESERTED.

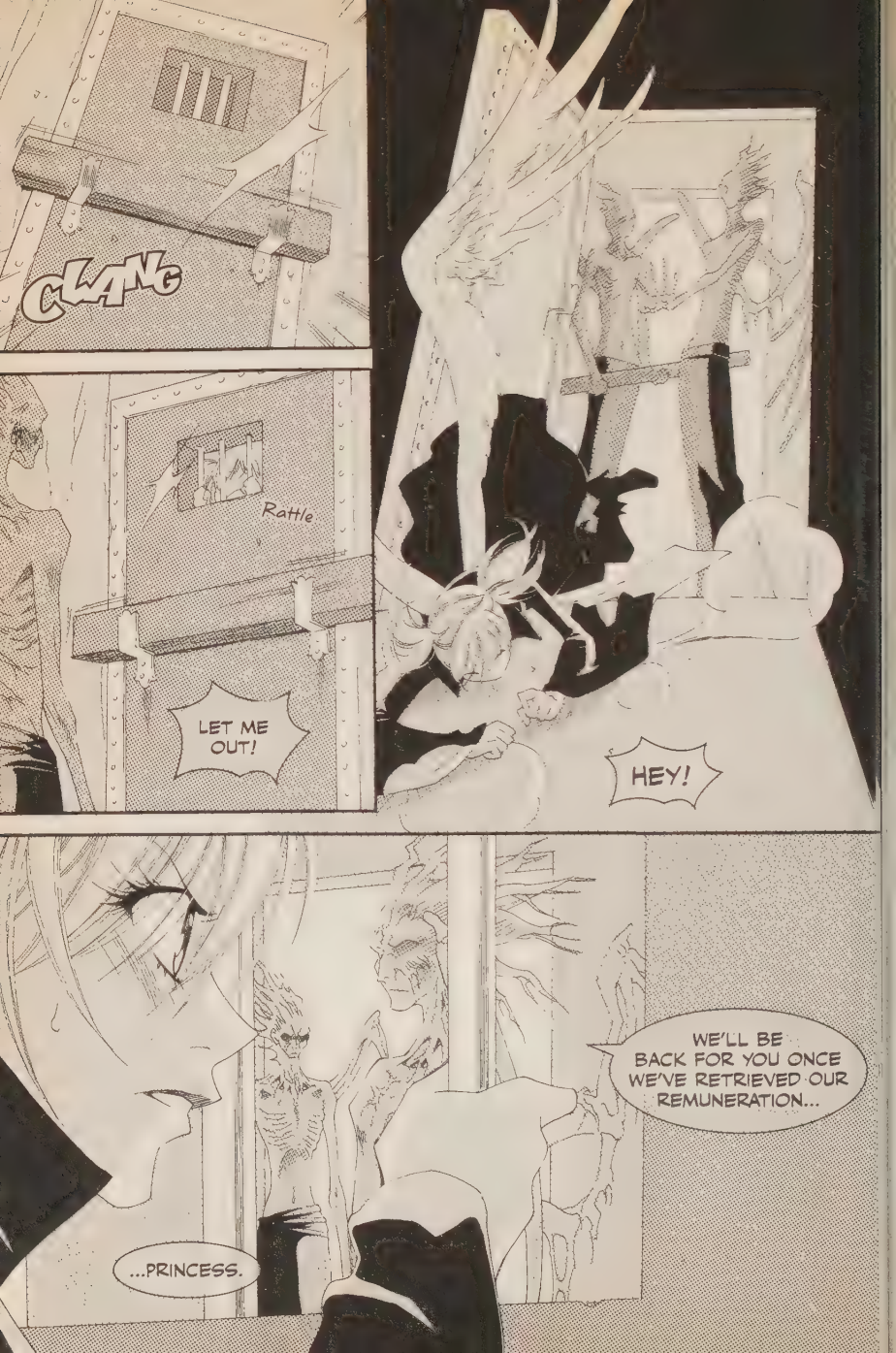

YOU IDIOTS! I JUST WARPED THROUGH A JEWELRY BOX TO ANOTHER LAND WITH THREE BAT-WINGED BROADS SO WE COULD RESCUE A POP STAR, WHO HAPPENS TO BE ROYALTY...
...WHO ALSO HAPPENS TO BE THE WOMAN YOU BOTH LOVE.
LONG DAY FOR ALL OF US, SURE. BUT DON'T YOU WANT TO SAVE HER?
BREAK IT UP, BOYS!
I'D LOVE TO GET BETWEEN YOU TWO, BELIEVE ME, BUT THIS IS NOT THE TIME!
.....
EVERY SECOND IS CRITICAL.
IT'S MEANING-LESS TO SIT HERE SQUABBLING.
.....
YOU GOT THAT RIGHT.

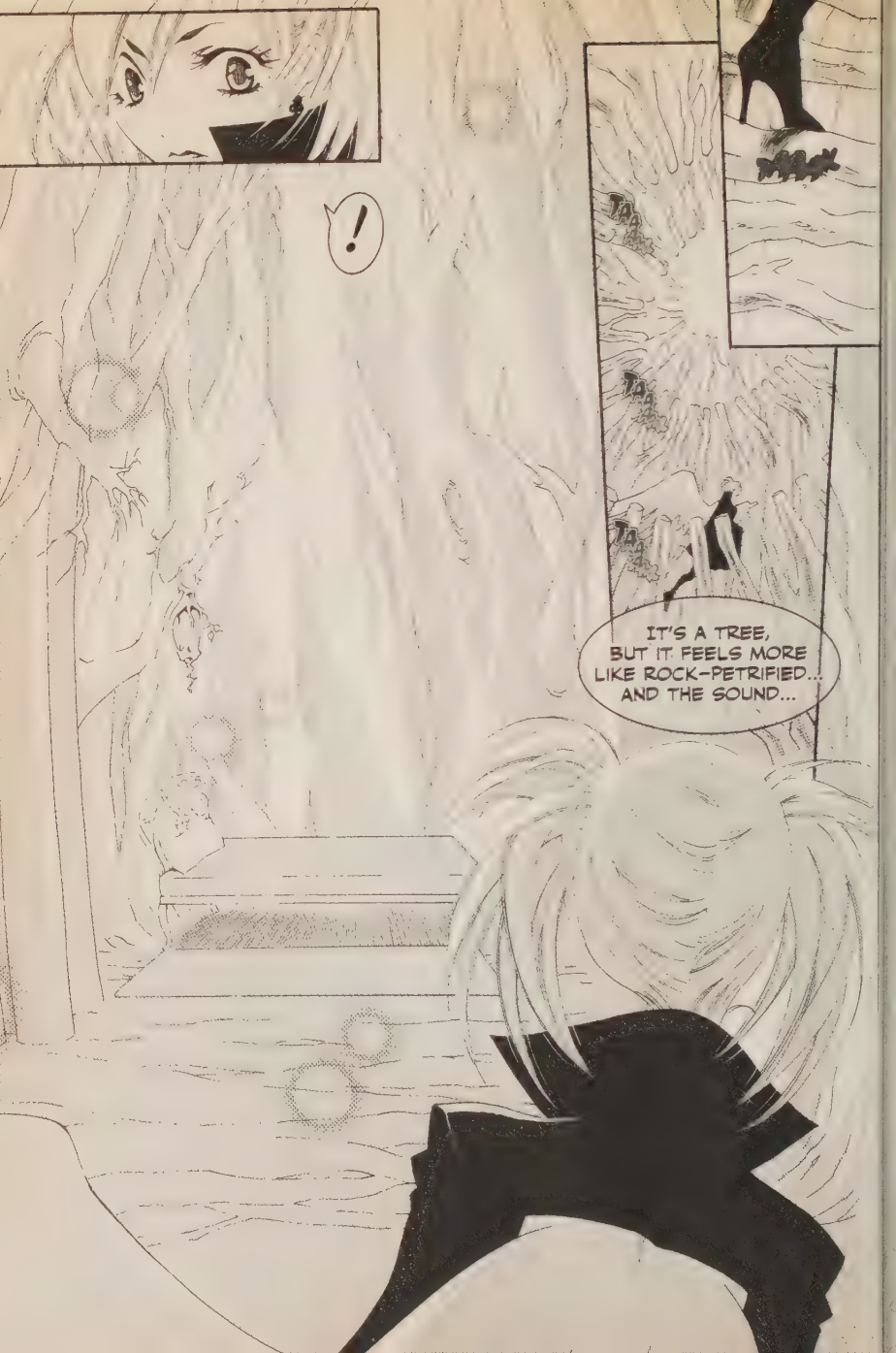
CHAPTER

9

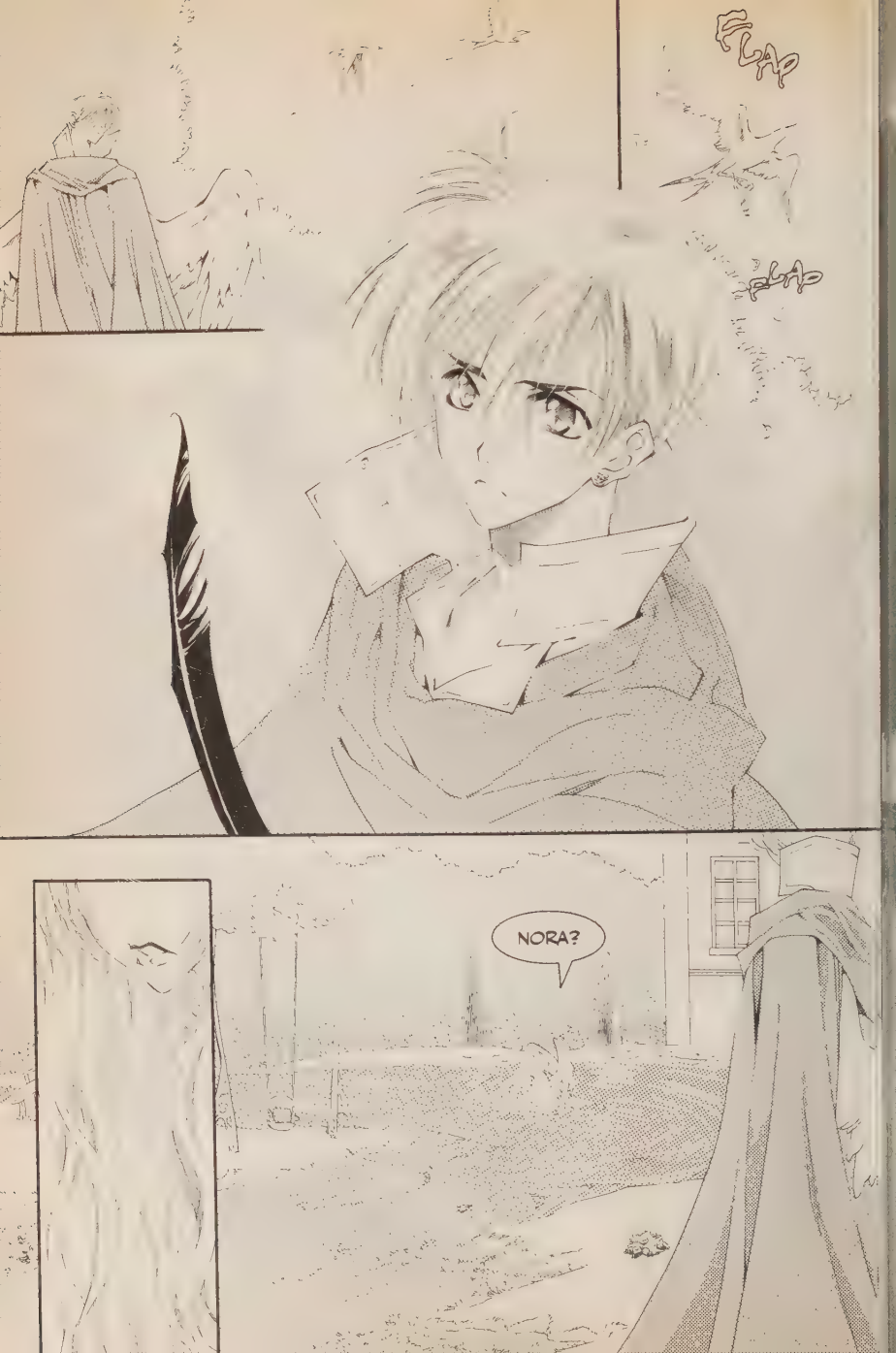
Tower

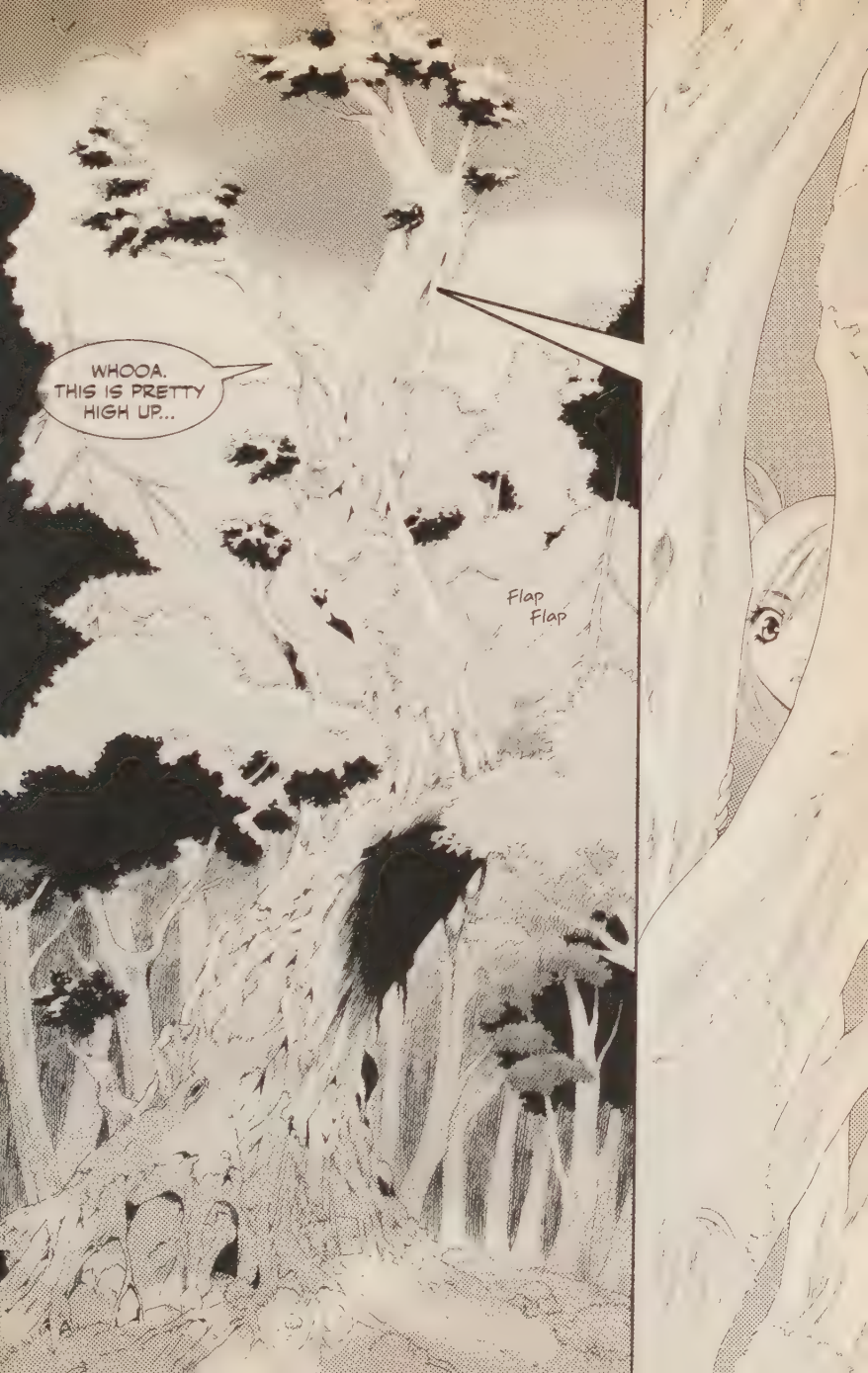

!!
THE BLOOD MACHINES?!
THIS WAS FOUND AT THE SITE.
A BLACK FEATHER--
A VULTURE FEATHER. THE MESSENGERS OF THE FALLEN...


CLANG
Rattle
LET ME OUT!
HEY!
WE'LL BE BACK FOR YOU ONCE WE'VE RETRIEVED OUR REMUNERATION...
...PRINCESS.

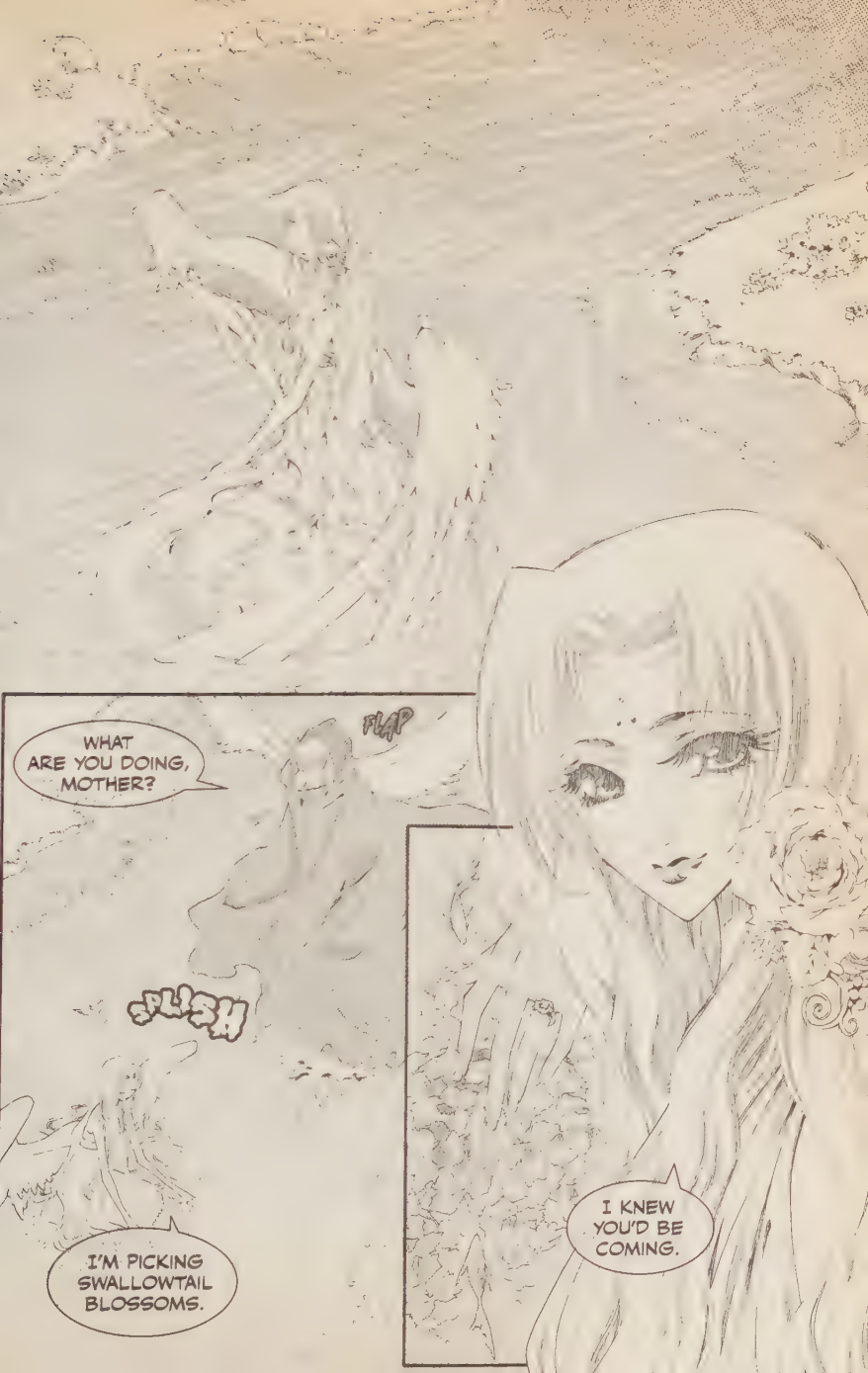

!
IT'S A TREE, BUT IT FEELS MORE LIKE ROCK-PETRIFIED... AND THE SOUND...

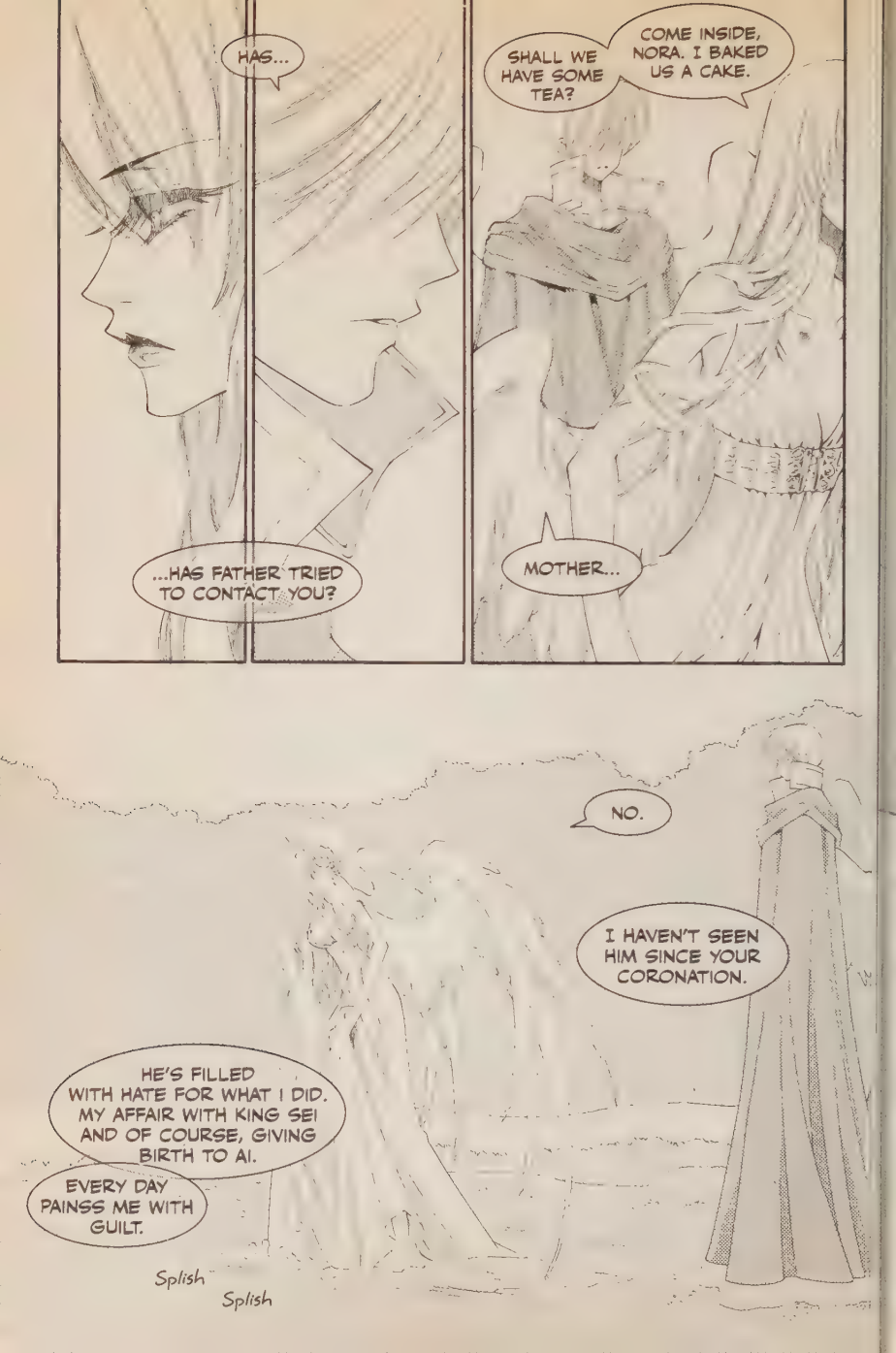
SLAM
CREEE
YOU DAMN BAGS OF BONES!
RATTLE
RATTLE
YOU'RE GOING TO REGRET PISSING ME OFF!
.....
INSIDE A GIANT TREE?
WHERE AM I, ANYWAY?

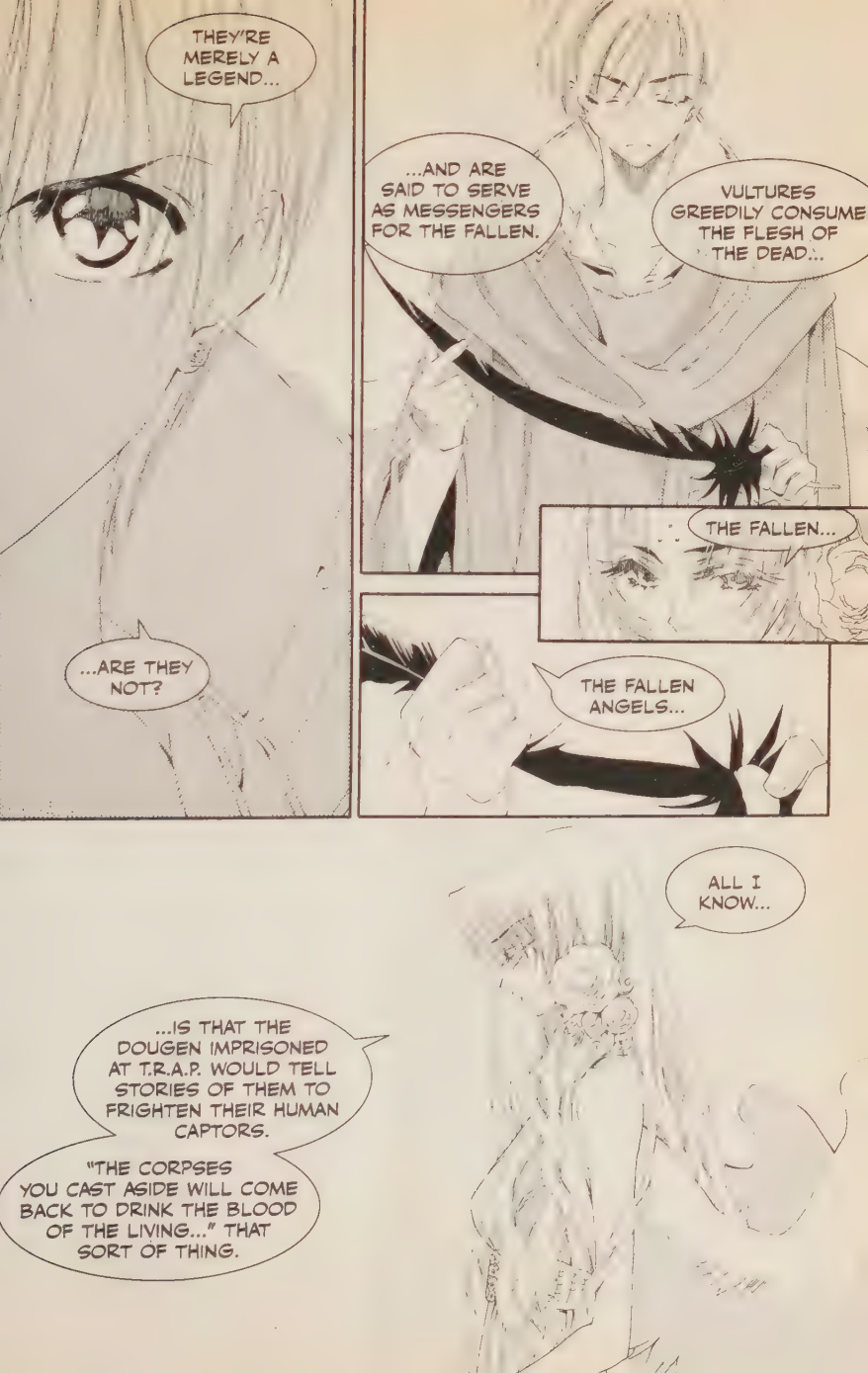

FLAP
FLAP
NORA?


WHOOA. THIS IS PRETTY HIGH UP...
Flap
Flap

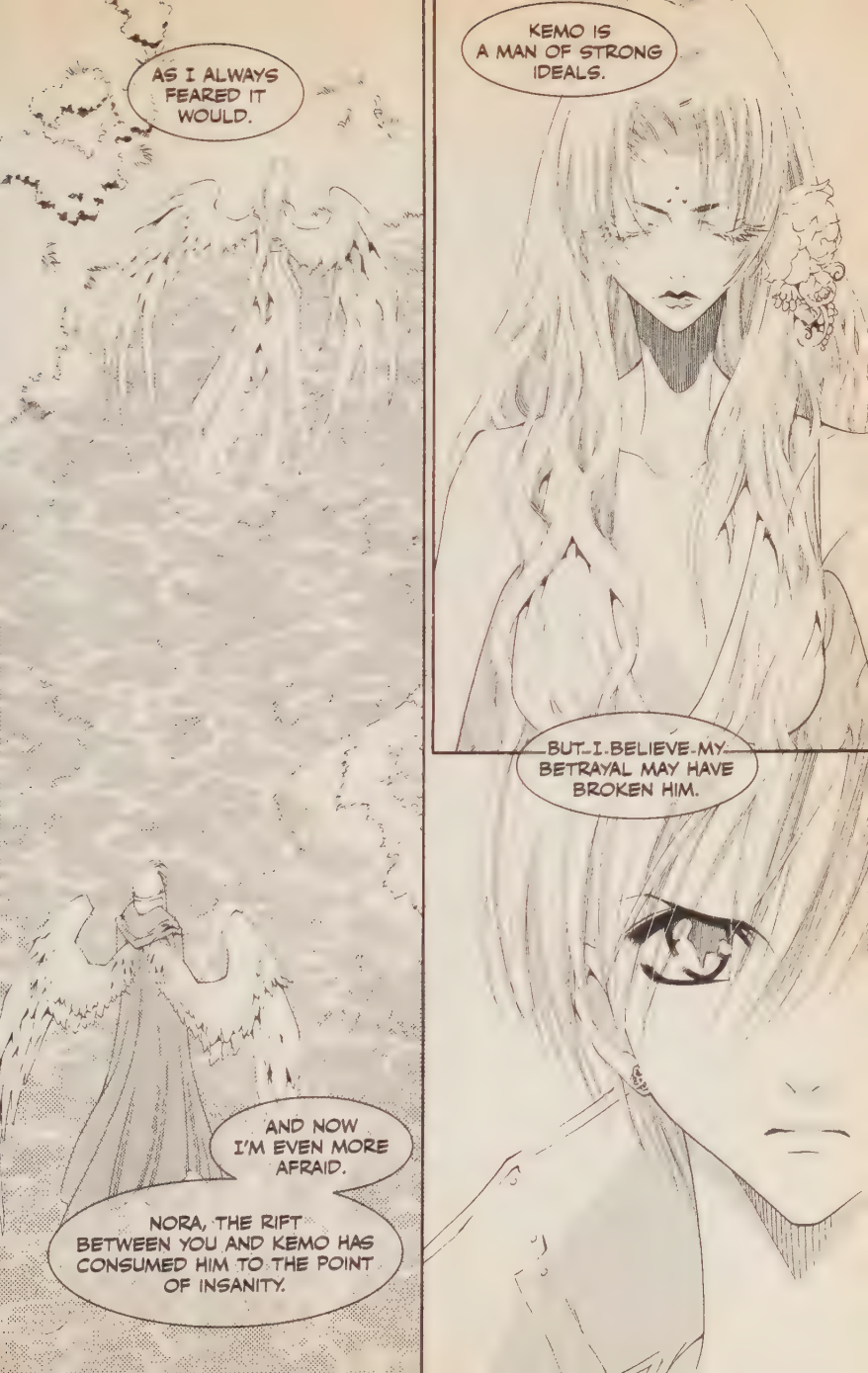
AREN'T THOSE A BIT RARE?
TRUE. I SUPPOSE I WON'T FIND THEM SO EASILY AFTER ALL.
SWALLOWTAIL BLOSSOMS...JUST LIKE MOTHER TO KEEP THE OLD DOUGEN TRADITIONS.
SHE'S HOPING TO PROTECT AI...
THAT'S A VULTURE FEATHER, ISN'T IT?
IT'S SO BLACK... RATHER OMINOUS, NO?
ANYWAY, IF YOU DON'T COME DRY OFF, YOU'LL CATCH A COLD.
MY GOODNESS!

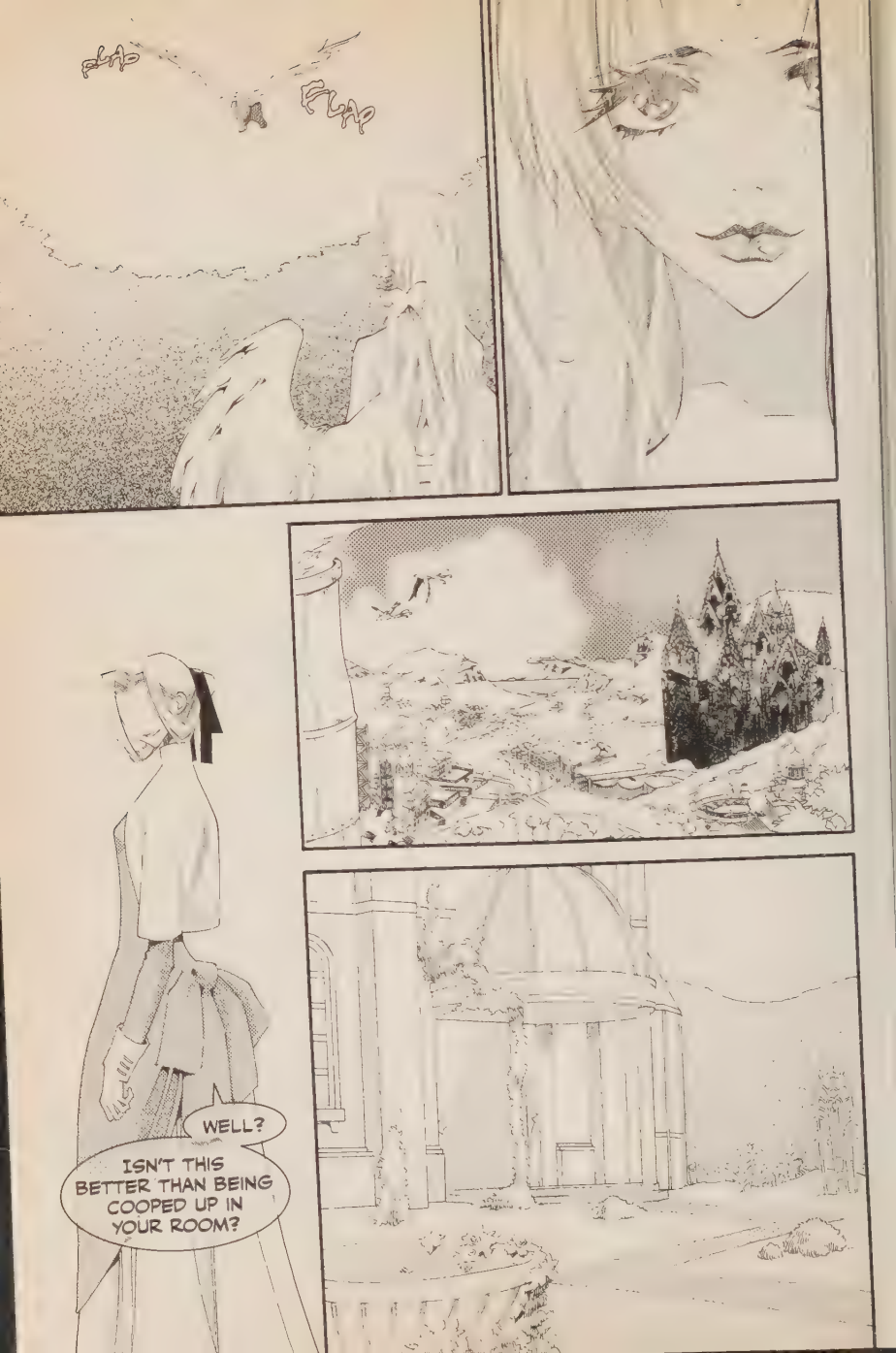

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MOTHER?
FLAP
I'M PICKING SWALLOWTAIL BLOSSOMS.
I KNEW YOU'D BE COMING.

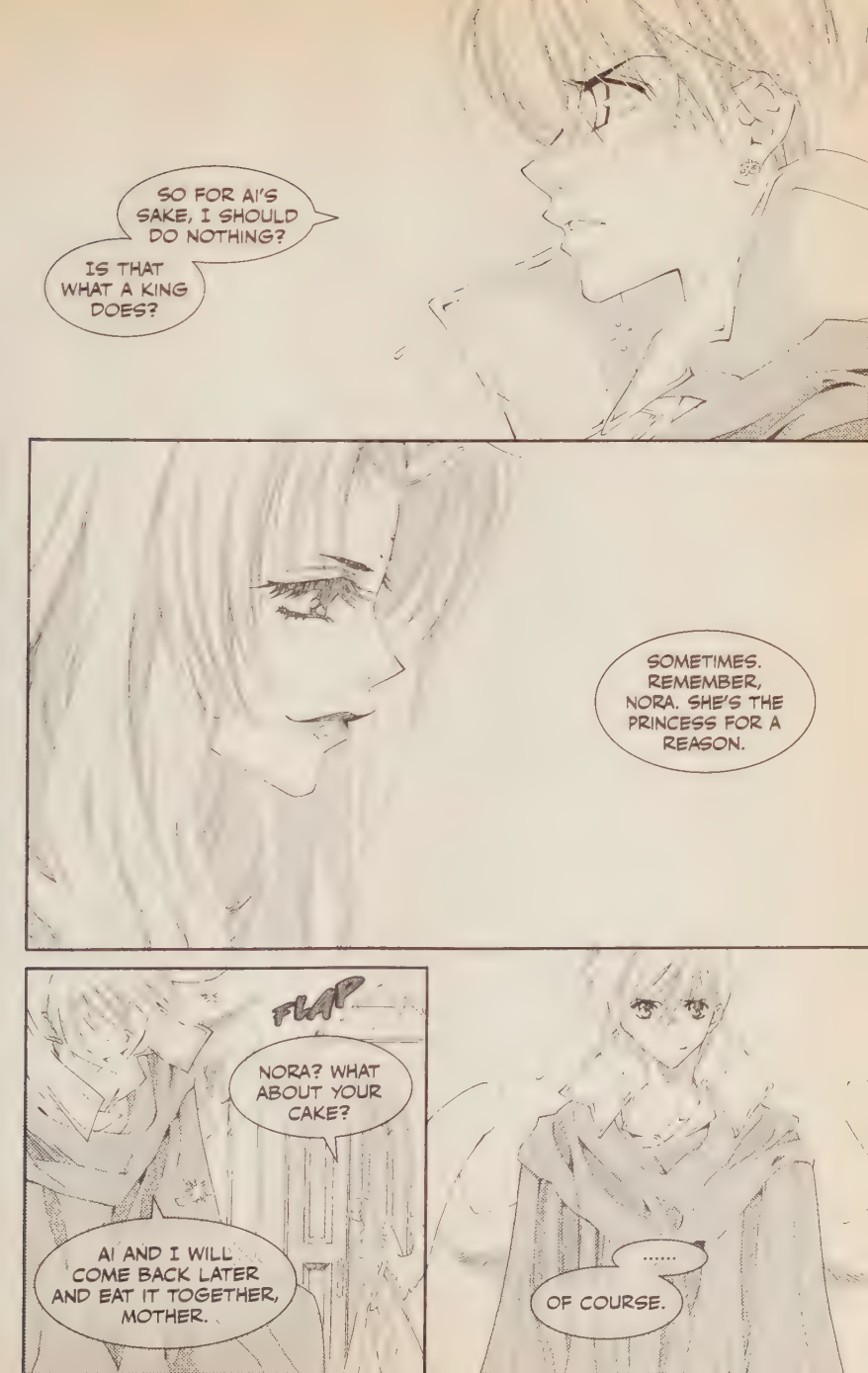

HAS...
...HAS FATHER TRIED TO CONTACT YOU?
SHALL WE HAVE SOME TEA?
COME INSIDE, NORA. I BAKED US A CAKE.
MOTHER...
NO.
I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM SINCE YOUR CORONATION.
HE'S FILLED WITH HATE FOR WHAT I DID. MY AFFAIR WITH KING SEI AND OF COURSE, GIVING BIRTH TO AI.
EVERY DAY PAINSS ME WITH GUILT.
Splish
Splish

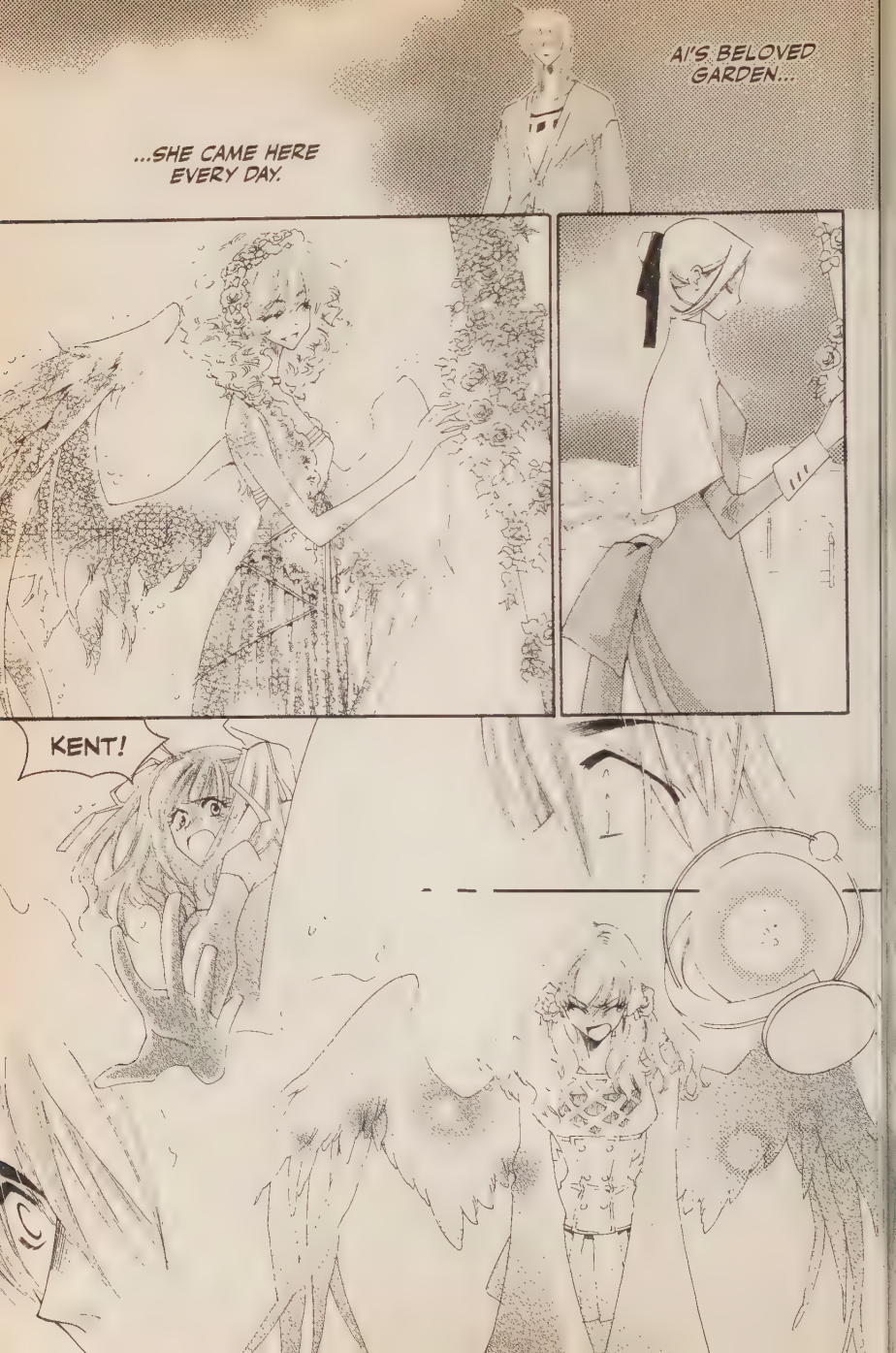

THEY'RE MERELY A LEGEND...
...ARE THEY NOT?
...AND ARE SAID TO SERVE AS MESSENGERS FOR THE FALLEN.
VULTURES GREEDILY CONSUME THE FLESH OF THE DEAD...
THE FALLEN...
THE FALLEN ANGELS...
ALL I KNOW...
...IS THAT THE DOUGEN IMPRISONED AT T.R.A.P. WOULD TELL STORIES OF THEM TO FRIGHTEN THEIR HUMAN CAPTORS.
"THE CORPSES YOU CAST ASIDE WILL COME BACK TO DRINK THE BLOOD OF THE LIVING..." THAT SORT OF THING.

ONE PRISM IS MISSING, AND AI HAS VANISHED. I BELIEVE THE PURPOSE BEHIND IT IS TO GET THE PRISM OF MERIDIAN EVE FROM ME.
I MAY OFFER TO EXCHANGE THE PRISM IN RETURN FOR AI'S SAFETY...
...IS THAT WHAT YOU SUGGEST, MOTHER?
AI CAN TAKE CARE OF HERSELF. AND I'LL BE SURE TO FIND MY SWALLOW-TAIL BLOSSOMS.
I UNDERSTAND HOW DIFFICULT THIS IS FOR YOU...
...BUT YOU HAVE A NEW RESPONSIBILITY NOW. YOUR BURDEN IS THAT OF AI-LAND.
YOU MUST PROTECT THIS COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE. DON'T COUNT ON THE KIDNAPPER'S WILLINGNESS TO BE REASONABLE.


AS I ALWAYS FEARED IT WOULD.
KEMO IS A MAN OF STRONG IDEALS.
BUT I BELIEVE MY BETRAYAL MAY HAVE BROKEN HIM.
AND NOW I'M EVEN MORE AFRAID.
NORA, THE RIFT BETWEEN YOU AND KEMO HAS CONSUMED HIM TO THE POINT OF INSANITY.


FLAP
FLAP
WELL?
ISN'T THIS BETTER THAN BEING COOPED UP IN YOUR ROOM?

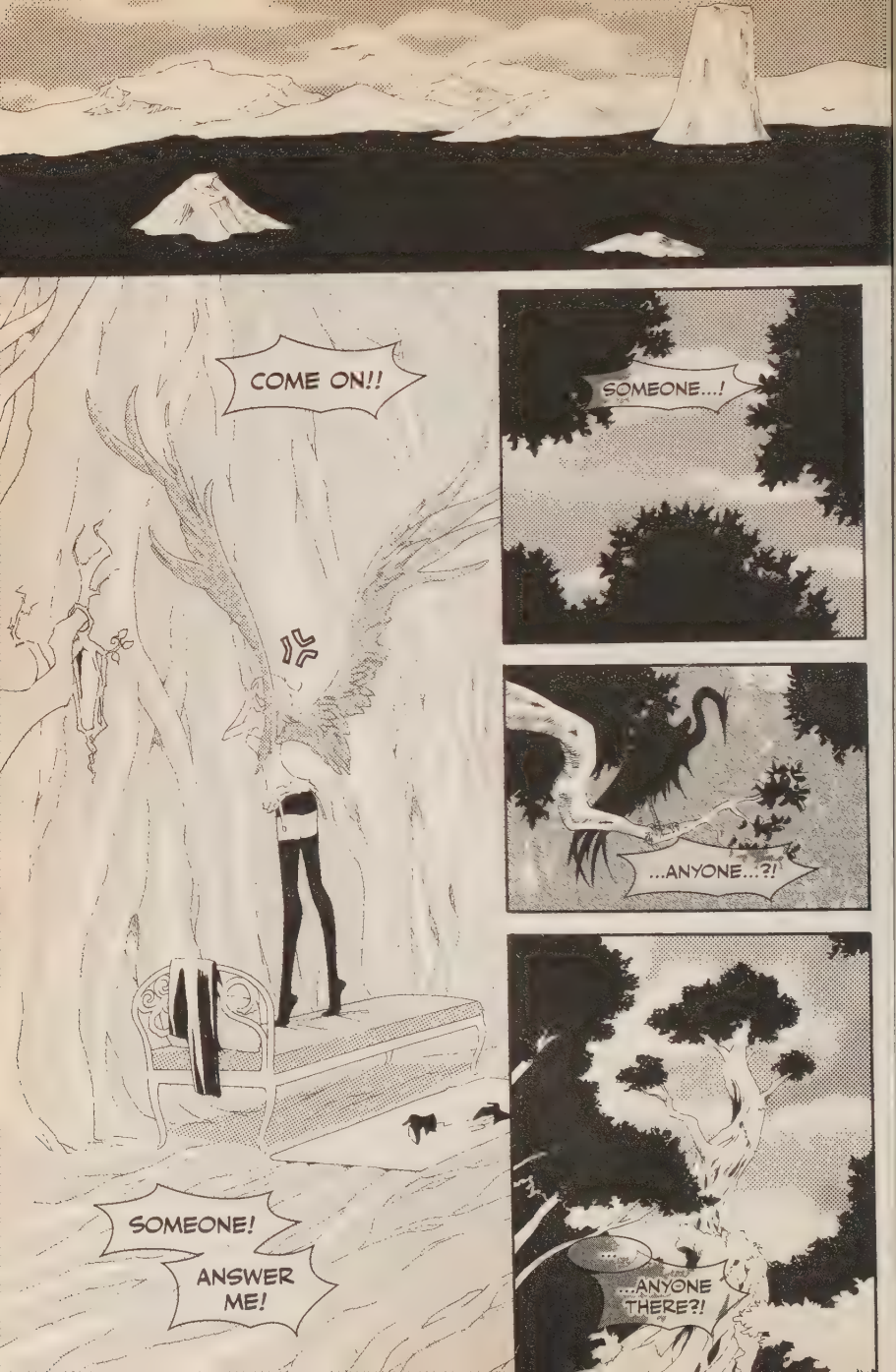

SO FOR AI'S SAKE, I SHOULD DO NOTHING?
IS THAT WHAT A KING DOES?
SOMETIMES. REMEMBER, NORA. SHE'S THE PRINCESS FOR A REASON.
FLAP
NORA? WHAT ABOUT YOUR CAKE?
AI AND I WILL COME BACK LATER AND EAT IT TOGETHER, MOTHER.
.....
OF COURSE.

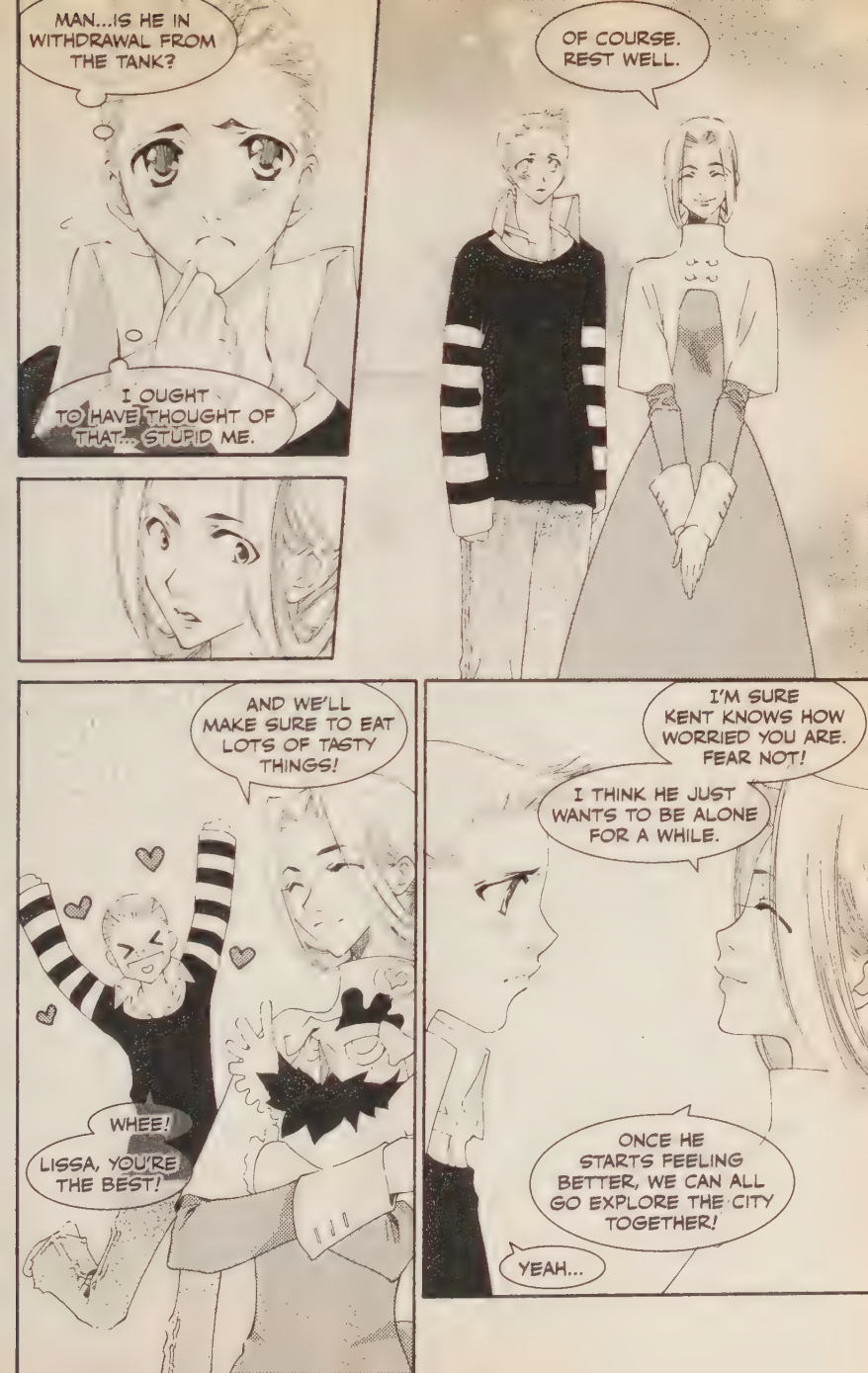

AI'S BELOVED GARDEN...
...SHE CAME HERE EVERY DAY.
KENT!

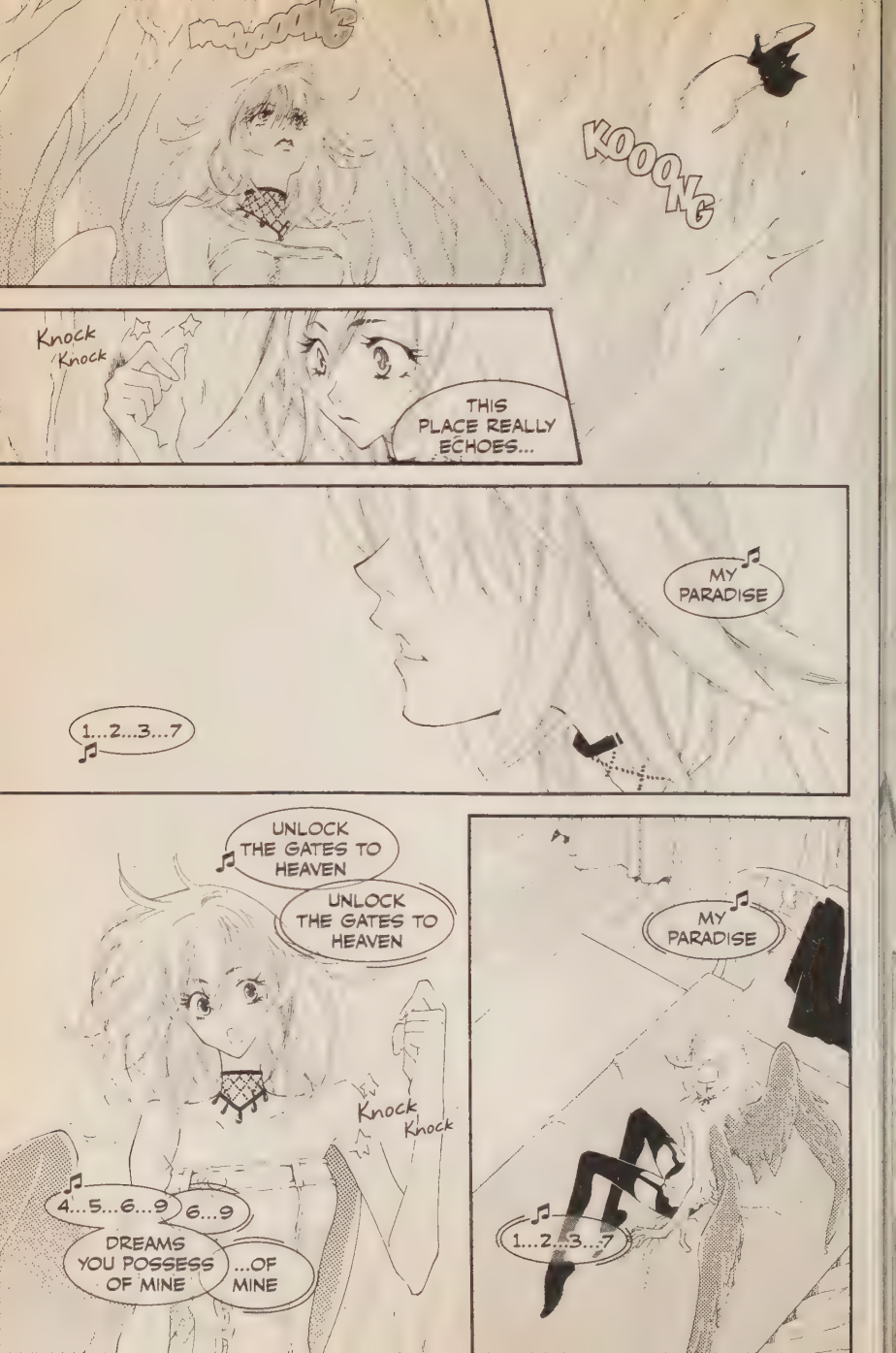
KENT...
A BEAUTIFUL PLACE LIKE THIS CAN CALM THE WILDEST PERSON.
EVEN OUR FEISTY PRINCESS LOVED THIS GARDEN—SHE CAME HERE EVERY DAY.
KING NORA ALWAYS HATED TO HAVE HER WANDERING AROUND WITHOUT A GUARD, OF COURSE.
BUT THE PRINCESS AND I STILL SPENT A LOT OF TIME HERE--JUST DRINKING TEA AND PICKING FLOWERS. THAT WAS SO PRECIOUS TO US.

IT'S JUST...
I WANT TO LIE DOWN FOR A BIT.
I'LL WALK YOU BACK TO YOUR ROOM.
I'LL BE FINE BY MYSELF.
LISSA... I WANT TO HEAR MORE STORIES ABOUT AI, AND AI-LAND... BUT I DON'T THINK I CAN RIGHT NOW.
PERHAPS I SHOULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT YOU OUT HERE...
YOU ARE LOOKING RATHER PALE...
NO, IT'S NOT THAT.
LISSA...
LET ME KNOW RIGHT AWAY IF THERE'S ANY WORD ABOUT AI.

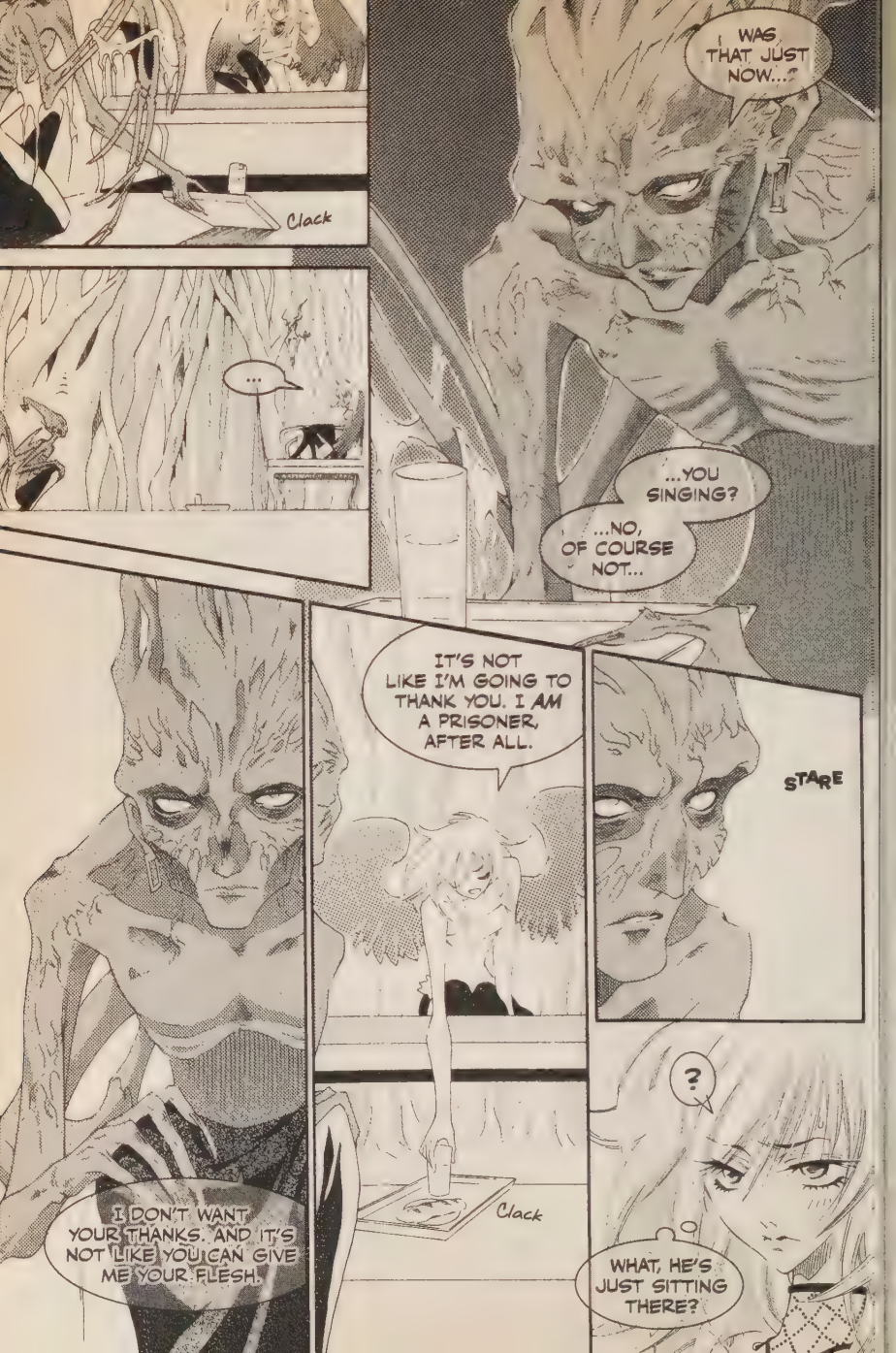
HIKARU!
AND RAWK.
LISSA!
THIS PLACE IS AMAZING!♥
RAWK'S BEEN SHOWING ME AROUND THE TOWN A BIT.
THE PALACE IS GREAT AND ALL...
BUT THERE ARE WAY TOO MANY ROOMS WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO ENTER!
Boo!
SO WE FIGURED WE'D GO PEOPLE-WATCH IN THE TOWN.
Rawk!
KENT, WANNA COME NEXT TIME?
TOTALLY!
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT!
KENT?
SO YOU'VE BEEN ENJOYING YOURSELVES?

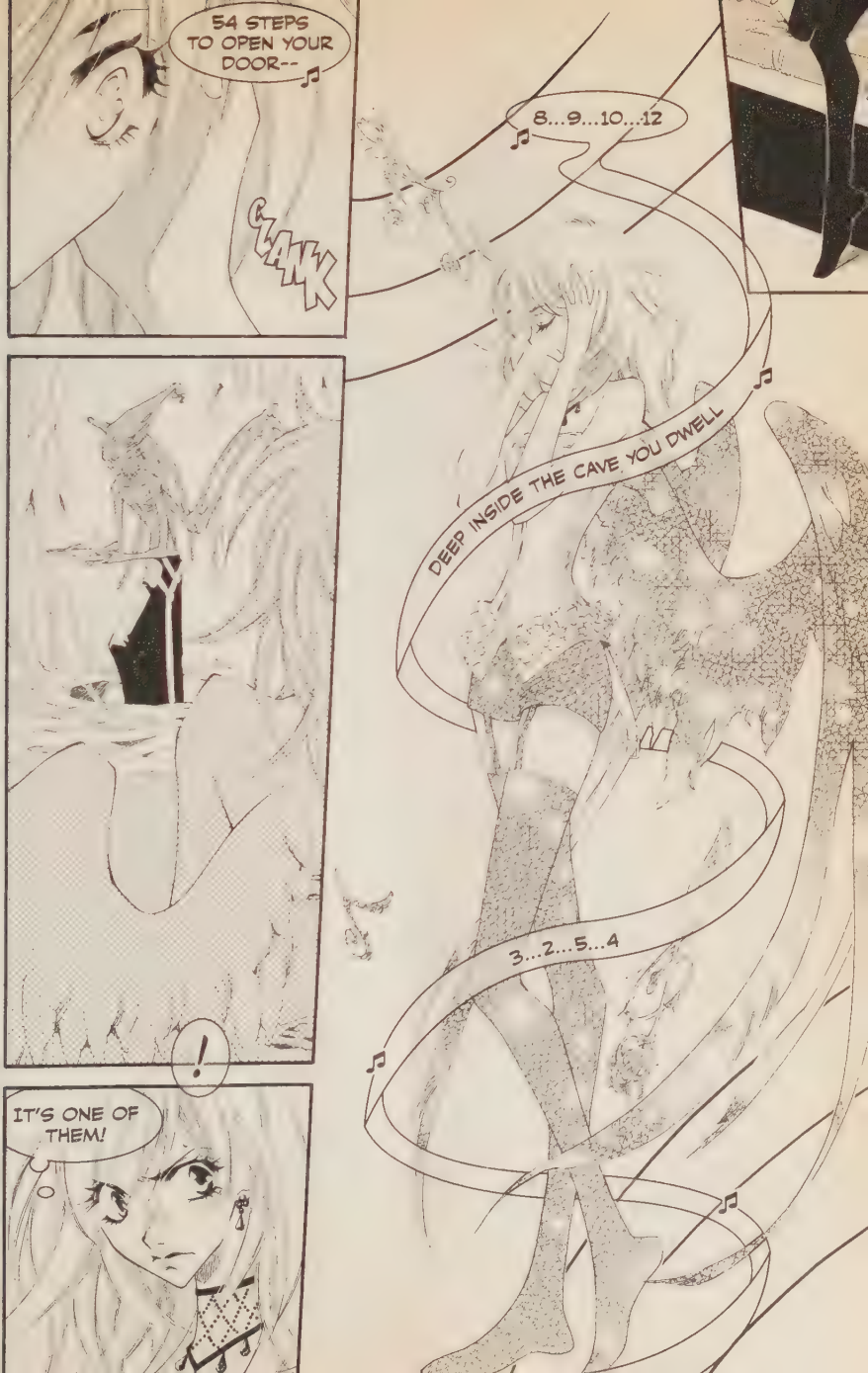

COME ON!!
SOMEONE...!
...ANYONE...?!
SOMEONE!
ANSWER ME!
...ANYONE THERE?!


MAN...IS HE IN WITHDRAWAL FROM THE TANK?
I OUGHT TO HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT... STUPID ME.
OF COURSE. REST WELL.
I'M SURE KENT KNOWS HOW WORRIED YOU ARE. FEAR NOT!
I THINK HE JUST WANTS TO BE ALONE FOR A WHILE.
ONCE HE STARTS FEELING BETTER, WE CAN ALL GO EXPLORE THE CITY TOGETHER!
YEAH...
AND WE'LL MAKE SURE TO EAT LOTS OF TASTY THINGS!
WHEE!
LISSA, YOU'RE THE BEST!

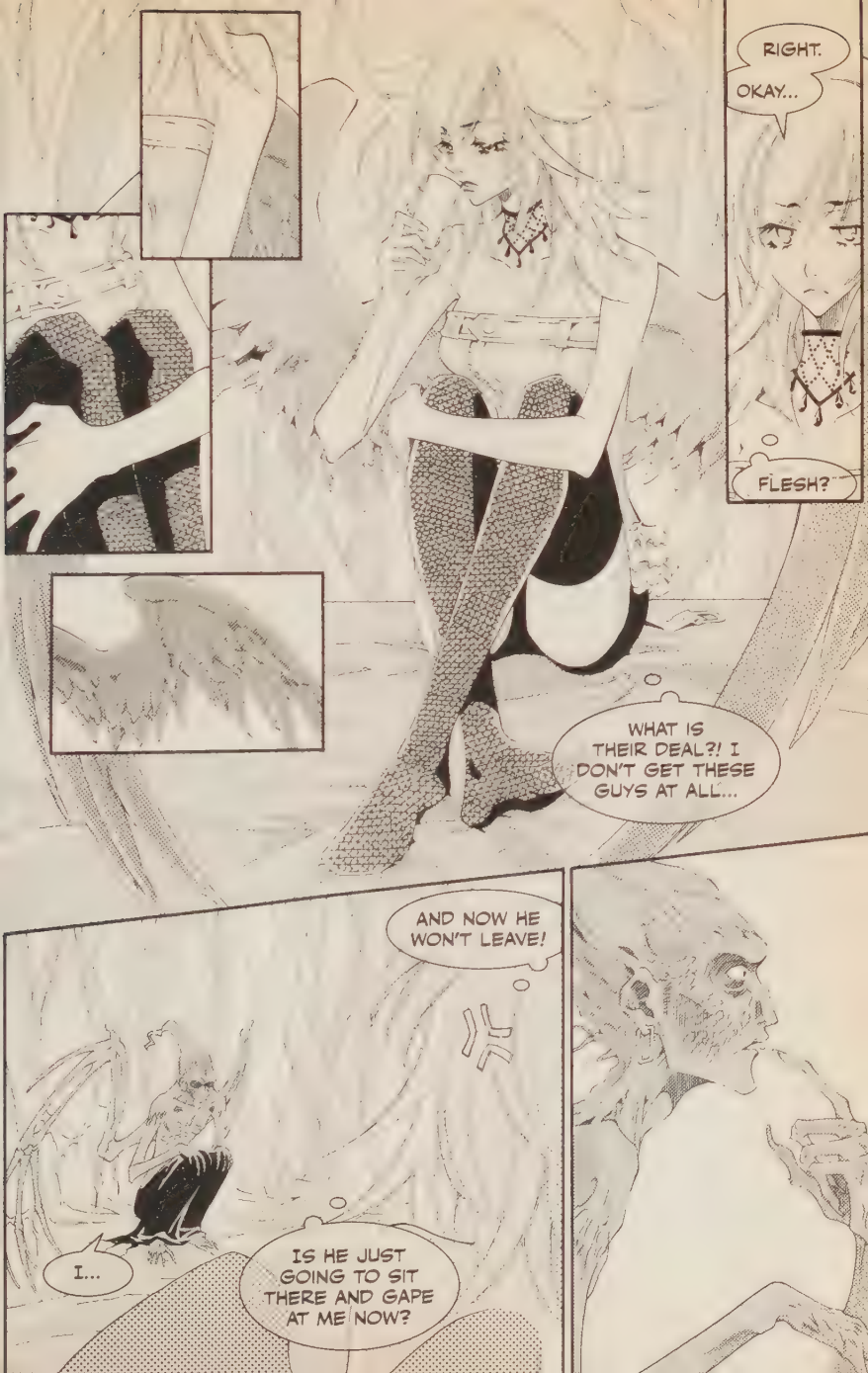

KOOONG
Knock Knock
THIS PLACE REALLY ECHOES...
MY PARADISE
1...2...3...7
UNLOCK THE GATES TO HEAVEN
UNLOCK THE GATES TO HEAVEN
Knock Knock
4...5...6...9
6...9
DREAMS YOU POSSESS OF MINE
...OF MINE
MY PARADISE
1...2...3...7

It's just me and the beasts out here
NRRGH!
WE'RE PRETTY FAR AWAY FROM CIVILIZATION. NO SURPRISE, I GUESS.
GRRRR!
SQUAWK!
Aw, man...
HAVE THEY BEEN OUT HERE IN THIS FOREST ALL ALONG? HIDING AWAY FROM THE HUMANS? BUT WHY?
WHAT IS IT THAT THEY WANT?
GURGLE
DAMMIT! I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M FRIGGIN' STUCK HERE!
THE FALLEN...
WHAT ARE THEY, ANYWAY? ARE THEY DOUGEN?
I DON'T LIKE THIS AT ALL...
...AND THEY REALLY CREEP ME OUT.

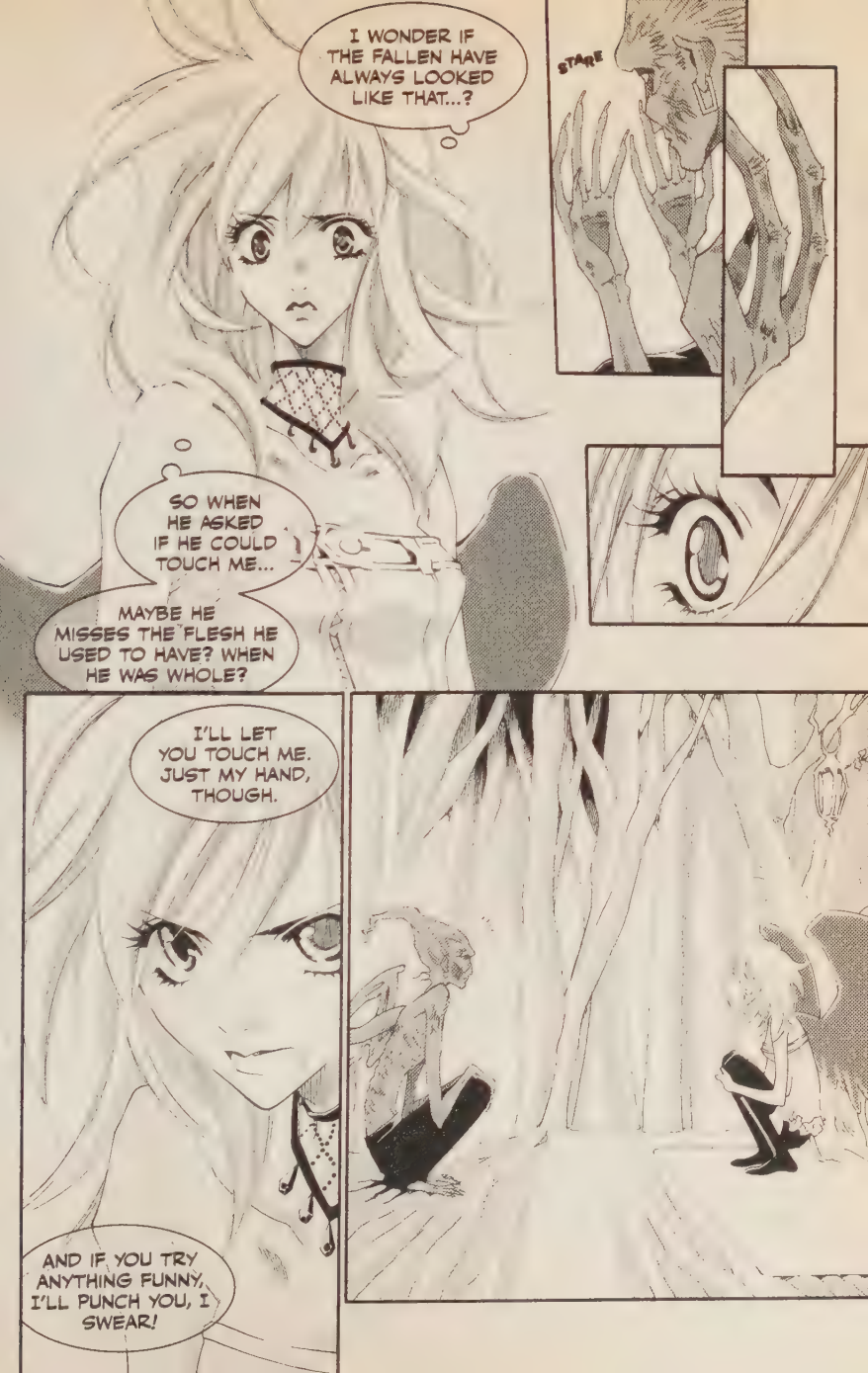

Clack
...
I WAS THAT JUST NOW...?
...YOU SINGING?
...NO, OF COURSE NOT...
IT'S NOT LIKE I'M GOING TO THANK YOU. I AM A PRISONER, AFTER ALL.
STARE
I DON'T WANT YOUR THANKS. AND IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CAN GIVE ME YOUR FLESH.
Clack
?
WHAT, HE'S JUST SITTING THERE?

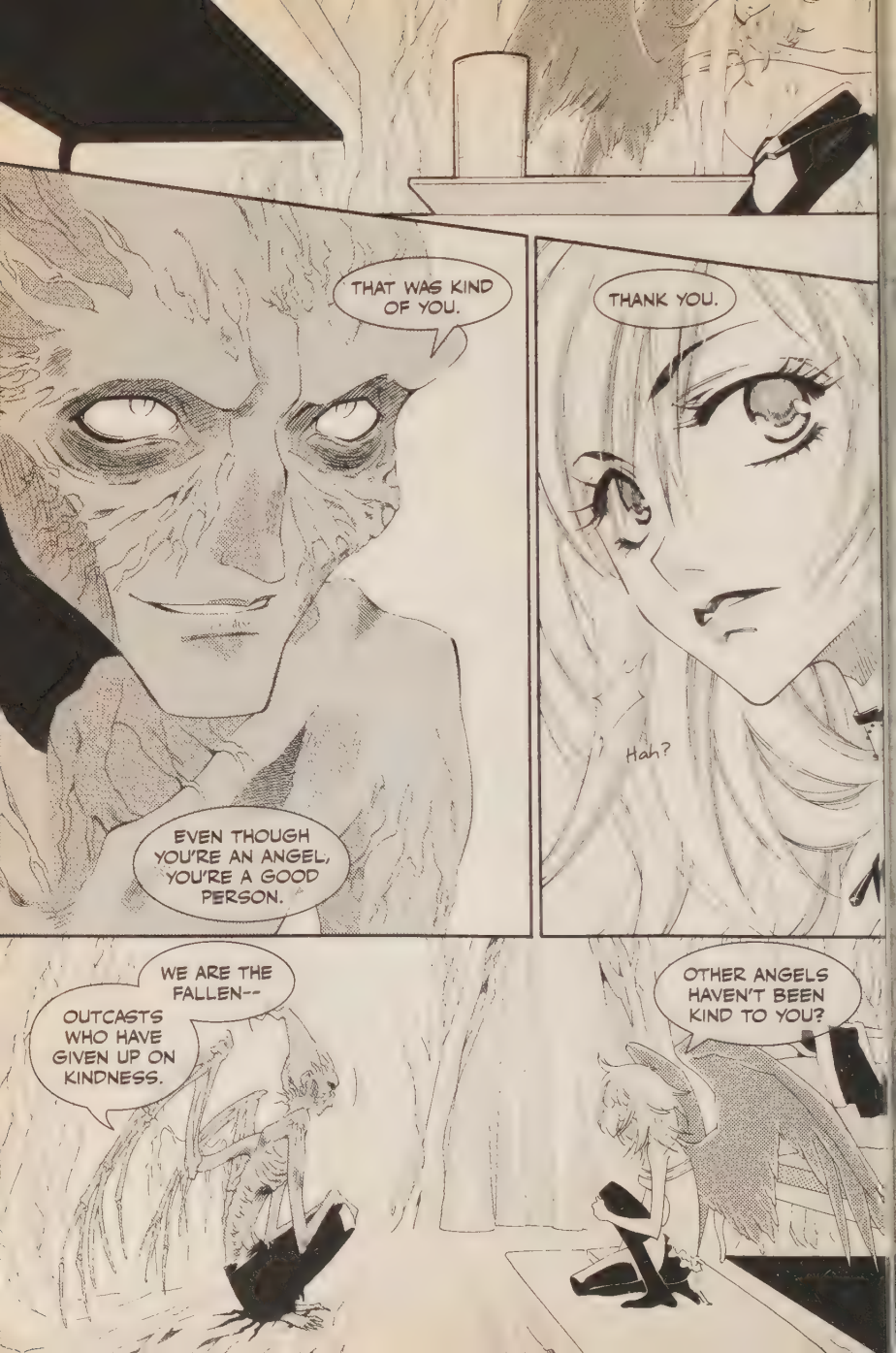

54 STEPS TO OPEN YOUR DOOR--
CLANK
8...9...10...12
DEEP INSIDE THE CAVE YOU DWELL
3...2...5...4
!
IT'S ONE OF THEM!

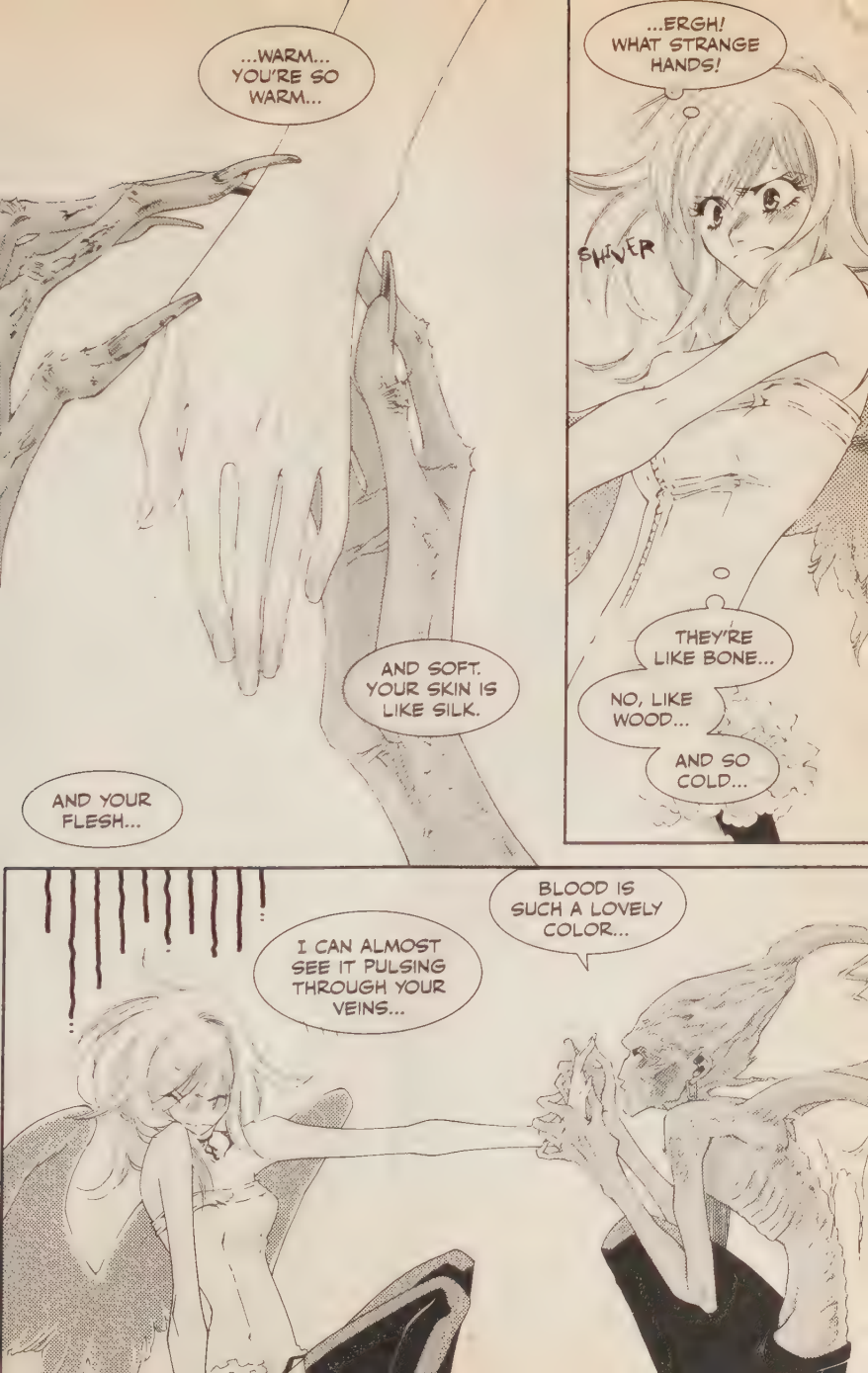
CAN I TOUCH YOU?
EXCUSE ME?!
Nod
IS HE SOME KIND OF PERVERT?
OR JUST A SCOLDED CHILD...?
...THE HELL?!
MAYBE THERE ARE NO MANNERS OUT HERE IN THE FOREST...
...BUT WHERE I COME FROM, YOU DON'T JUST GET TO "TOUCH" A LADY.


RIGHT.
OKAY...
FLESH?
WHAT IS THEIR DEAL?! I DON'T GET THESE GUYS AT ALL...
AND NOW HE WON'T LEAVE!
I...
IS HE JUST GOING TO SIT THERE AND GAPE AT ME NOW?

Nod
nod
HERE.


I WONDER IF THE FALLEN HAVE ALWAYS LOOKED LIKE THAT...?
STARE
SO WHEN HE ASKED IF HE COULD TOUCH ME...
MAYBE HE MISSES THE FLESH HE USED TO HAVE? WHEN HE WAS WHOLE?
I'LL LET YOU TOUCH ME. JUST MY HAND, THOUGH.
AND IF YOU TRY ANYTHING FUNNY, I'LL PUNCH YOU, I SWEAR!


THAT WAS KIND OF YOU.
EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE AN ANGEL, YOU'RE A GOOD PERSON.
THANK YOU.
Hah?
WE ARE THE FALLEN--
OUTCASTS WHO HAVE GIVEN UP ON KINDNESS.
OTHER ANGELS HAVEN'T BEEN KIND TO YOU?


...WARM... YOU'RE SO WARM...
AND SOFT. YOUR SKIN IS LIKE SILK.
AND YOUR FLESH...
...ERGH! WHAT STRANGE HANDS!
SHIVER
THEY'RE LIKE BONE...
NO, LIKE WOOD...
AND SO COLD...
I CAN ALMOST SEE IT PULSING THROUGH YOUR VEINS...
BLOOD IS SUCH A LOVELY COLOR...

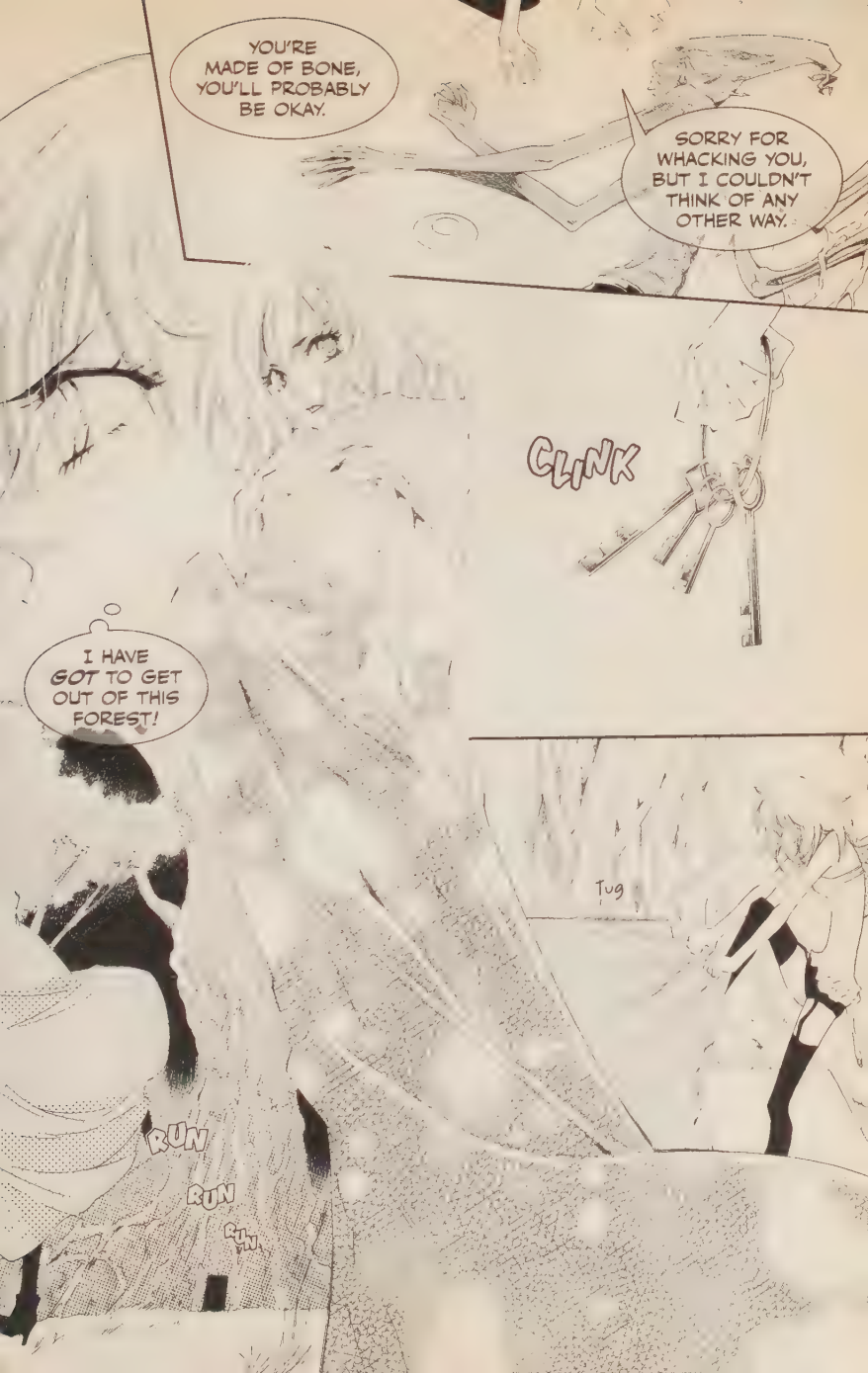
GRAB
ZANK!
.....
FWUMP
~~~~~!
~~~~~

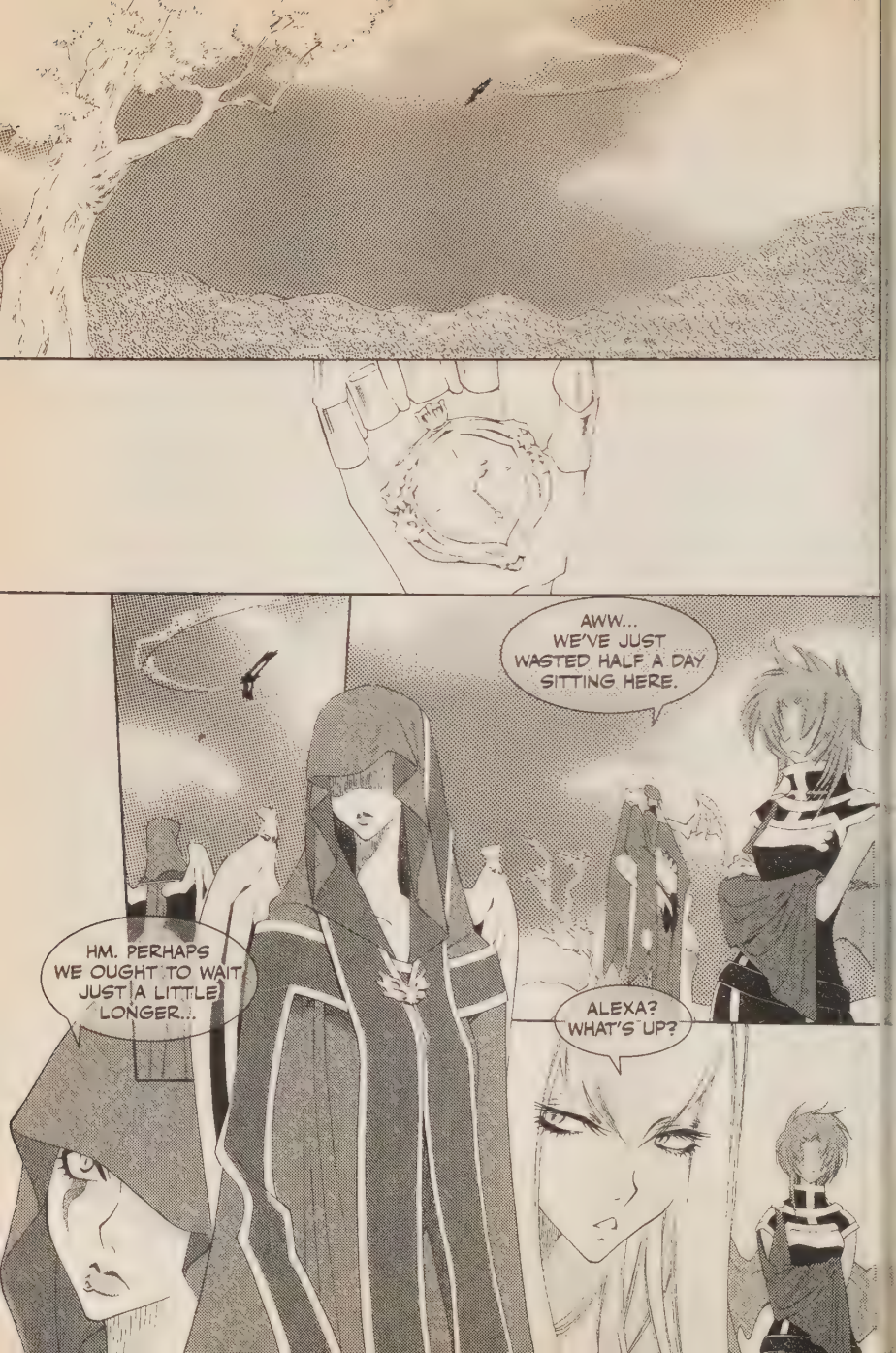
MY WINGS?
YOU SEE, WE DON'T HAVE FEATHERS ANYMORE...
CLINK
.....
HEY... WOULD YOU LET ME TOUCH YOUR WINGS NEXT?
SURE...ALL RIGHT.
IT'S FINE TO TOUCH MY WINGS.
IF YOU JUST SCOOT OVER HERE A BIT, I'LL LET YOU TOUCH THEM.
...ESPECIALLY FOR YOU...
JUST FOR YOU...

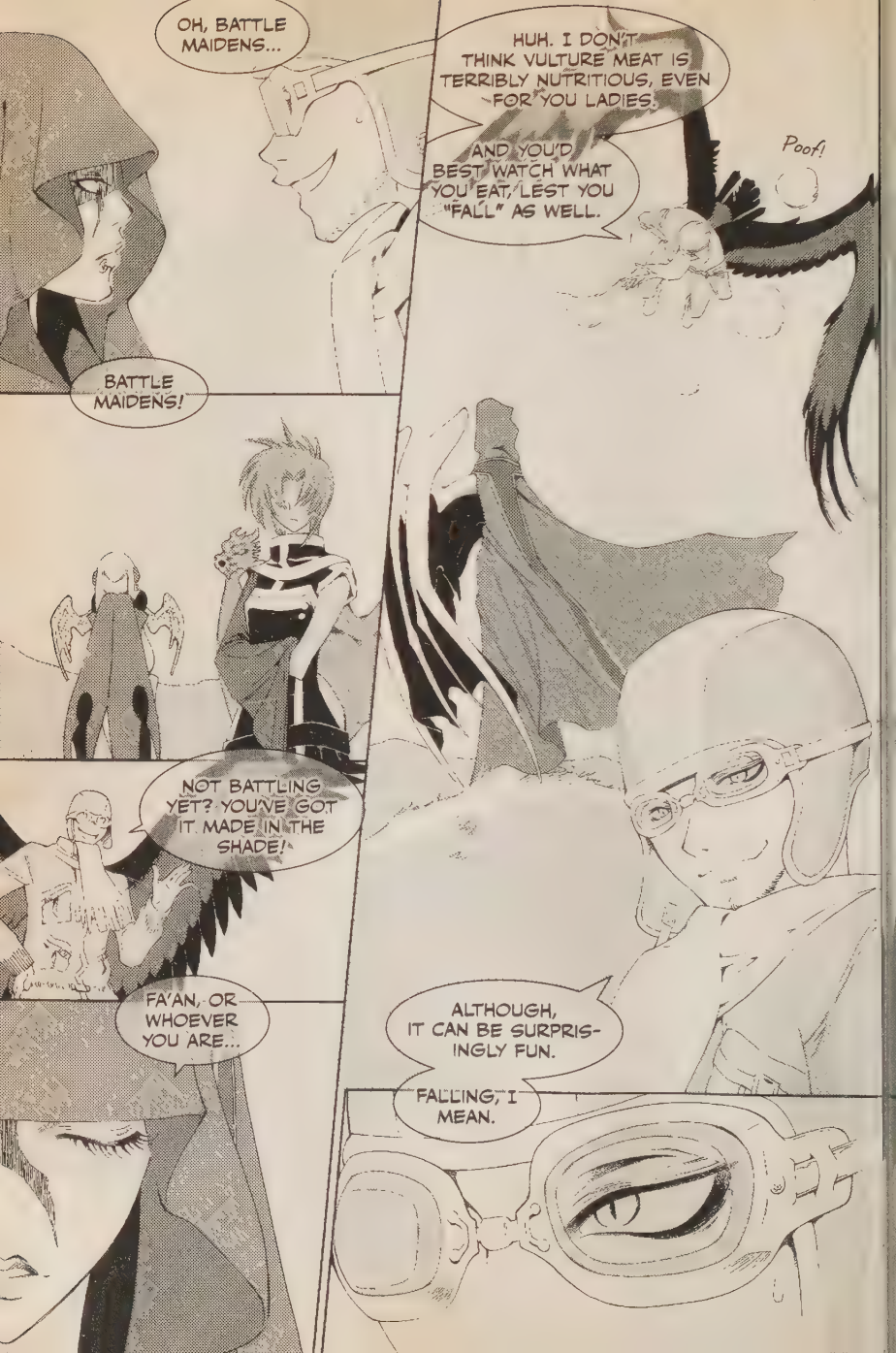
CHAPTER

10

Tower


YOU'RE MADE OF BONE, YOU'LL PROBABLY BE OKAY.
SORRY FOR WHACKING YOU, BUT I COULDN'T THINK OF ANY OTHER WAY.
CLINK
I HAVE GOT TO GET OUT OF THIS FOREST!
Tug
RUN
RUN
RUN

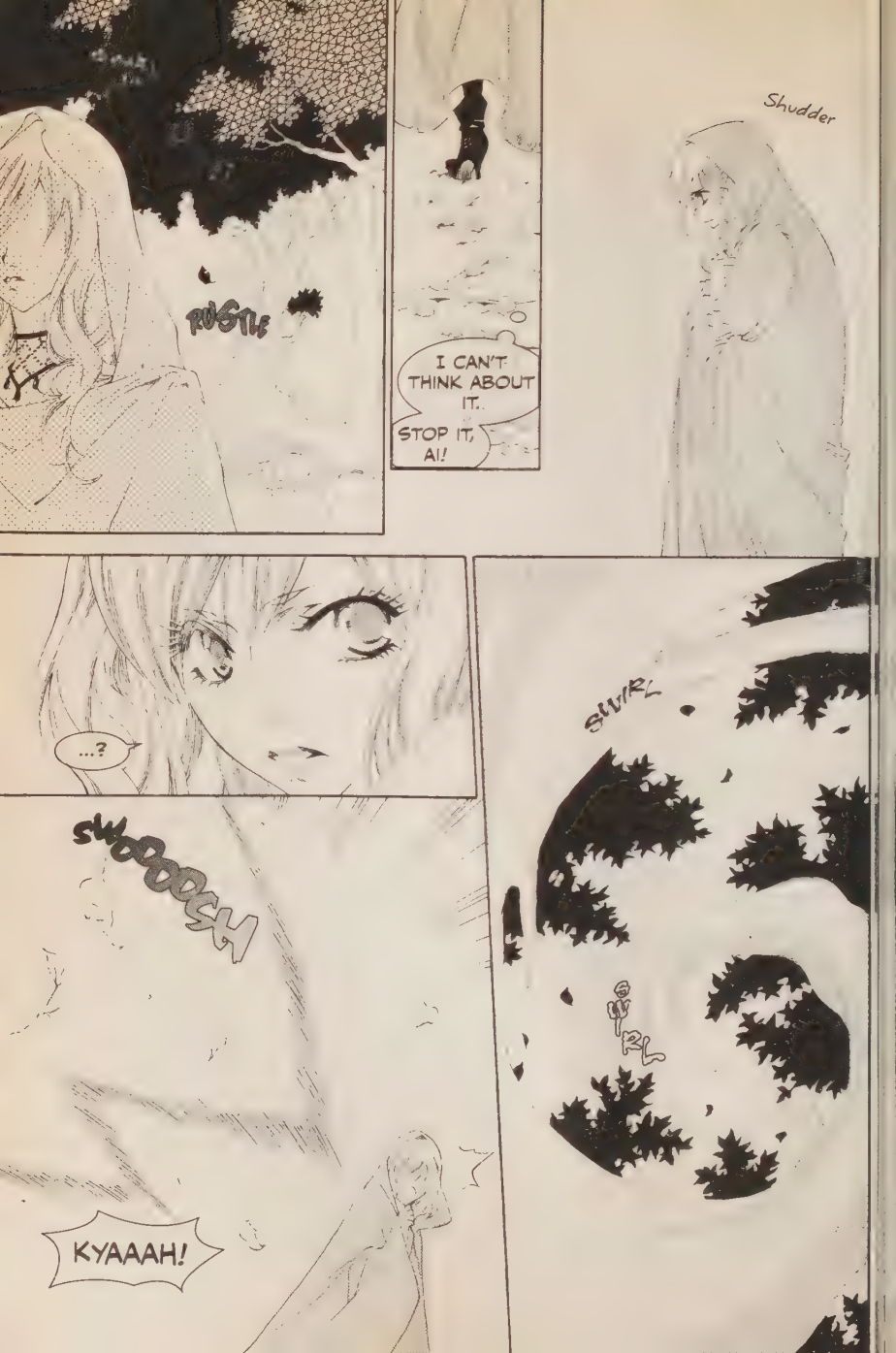

AWW... WE'VE JUST WASTED HALF A DAY SITTING HERE.
HM. PERHAPS WE OUGHT TO WAIT JUST A LITTLE LONGER...
ALEXA? WHAT'S UP?


OH, BATTLE MAIDENS...
BATTLE MAIDENS!
HUH. I DON'T THINK VULTURE MEAT IS TERRIBLY NUTRITIOUS, EVEN FOR YOU LADIES.
AND YOU'D BEST WATCH WHAT YOU EAT, LEST YOU "FALL" AS WELL.
Poof!
NOT BATTLING YET? YOU'VE GOT IT MADE IN THE SHADE!
FA'AN, OR WHOEVER YOU ARE...
ALTHOUGH, IT CAN BE SURPRISINGLY FUN.
FALLING, I MEAN.

FLAP
COULDN'T YOU HAVE GONE BACK TO THE OTHER SIDE FOR THIS LITTLE RENDEZVOUS?
WE ARE THE ONES WHO SUMMONED YOU.
BUT IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH REMAINING ON THIS SIDE, WE CAN SHOW SOME CONSIDERATION.
PERHAPS, FOR INSTANCE...
...YOU'D LIKE EGGI TO PUT A HOLE THROUGH YOUR WING WITH ONE OF HER ICE ARROWS.

TO LOVE, YOU MUST LET YOUR GUARD DOWN...
BUT FOR OUR AI...
FLUTTER
...I HOPE SUCH MONSTERS...
...BUT ONCE YOUR GUARD HAS FALLEN, MONSTERS ARE FREE TO PREY UPON YOU.
...STAY ASLEEP.

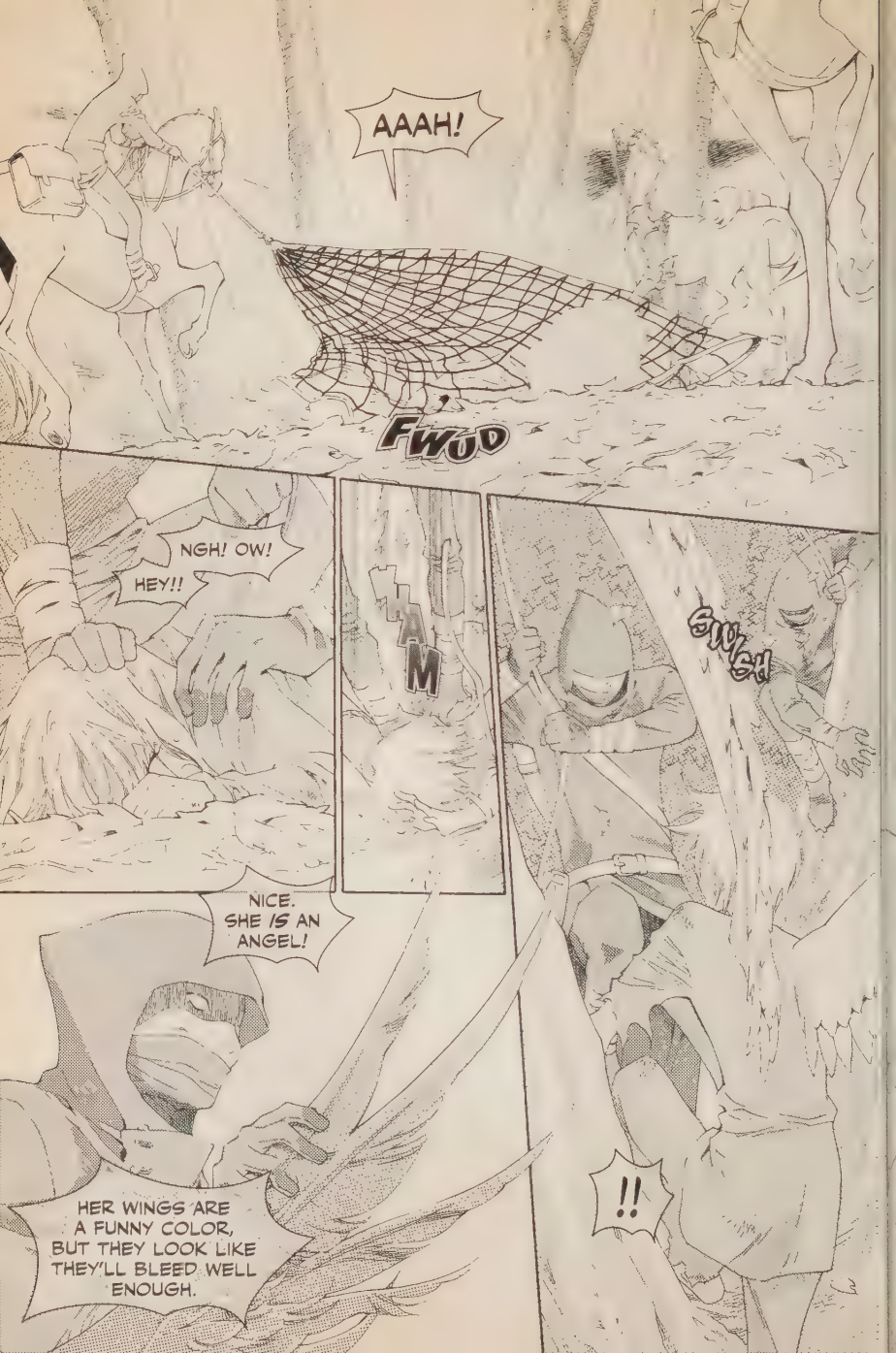
...THE PRISM...EH?
WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO TELL US ALL YOU KNOW OF THIS BOX AND THE PRISM.
!
THE ONLY REASON WHY WE SISTERS NEVER "FELL" WAS BECAUSE WE FELL FOR THE CHARM OF THE PRINCESS INSTEAD.
Flap Flap
SO TELL US WHAT YOU KNOW. FOR THE LOVE OF THE PRINCESS.
?
"THERE MUST BE SOME SORT OF AMAZING TREASURE SLEEPING HERE!"
AND I BELIEVE YOU CARE FOR HER AS WE DO.
"NO ONE EVER COMES NEAR THIS PLACE."

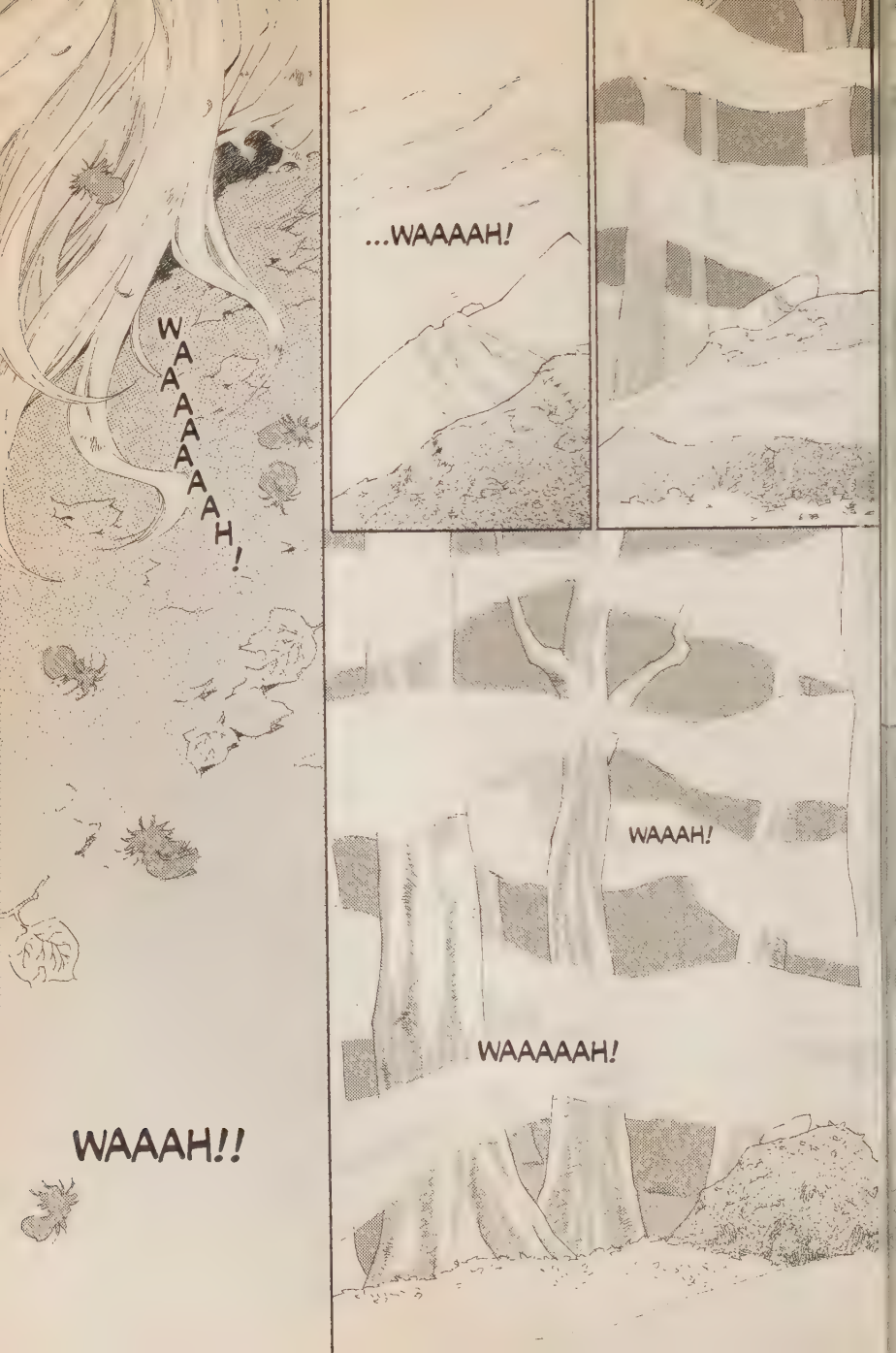

RUSTLE
I CAN'T THINK ABOUT IT..
STOP IT, AI!
Shudder
...?
SWOOOOSH
KYAAAH!
SWIRL
SWIRL

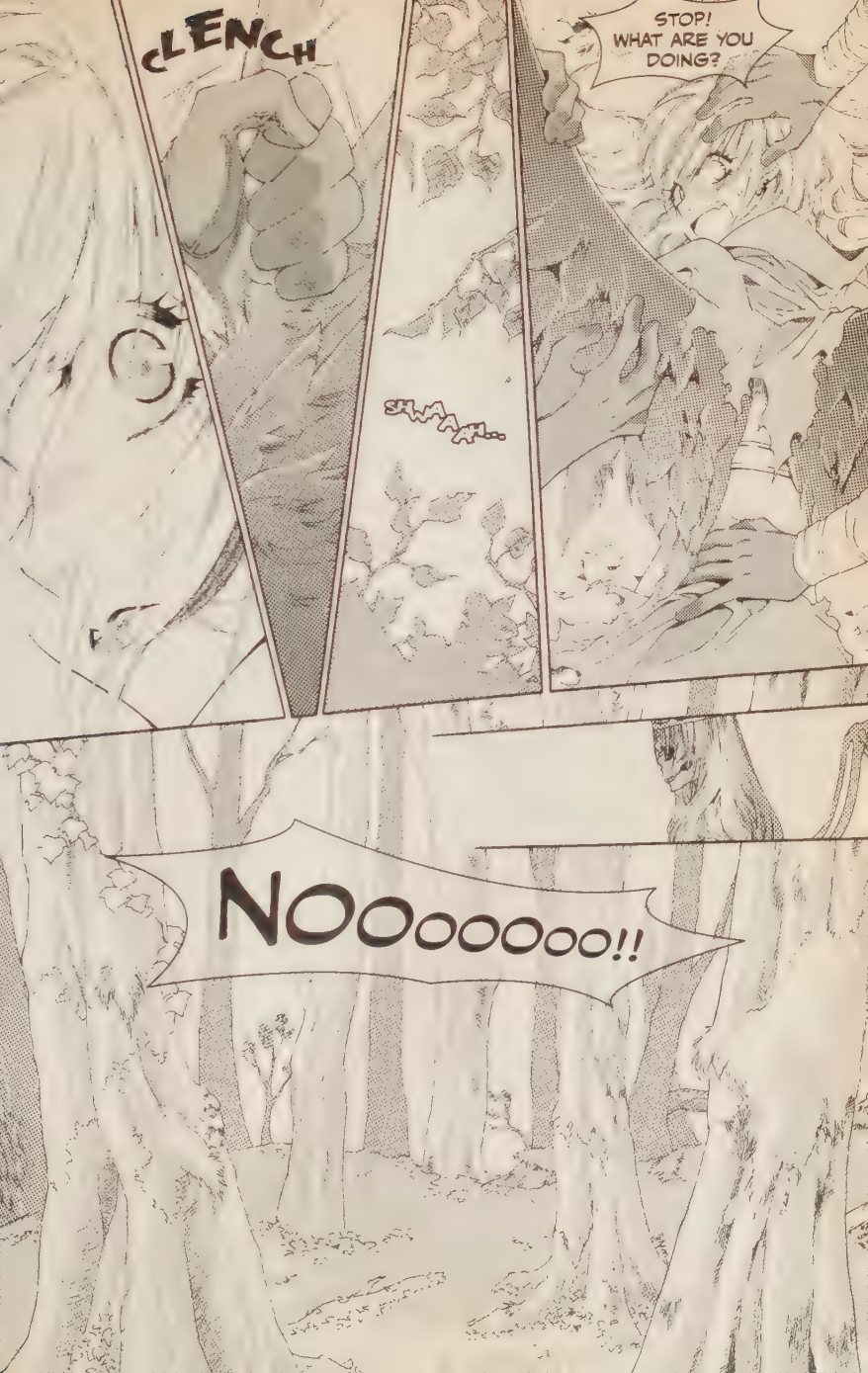
NO FOOD, NO WATER...
IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE WITH NO SENSE OF DIRECTION...
I'M JUST WANDERING RANDOMLY.
IT'S SO DIFFERENT FROM THE CITY. IF I END UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FOREST, THEN WHAT DO I DO?
Sigh
THIS FOREST IS IMMENSE.
HOW FAR HAVE I WALKED?
I WAS REALLY HOPING TO GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE NIGHTFALL...
SKREEEE!
FLAP
FLAP
FLAP
Twitch
GET IT TOGETHER, AI.
IT'S JUST A FRIGGIN' BIRD.

QUICKLY!
YOU DON'T WANT TO BE KILLED, DO YOU?!
BUT...WAIT!
I'M AI!
I AM YOUR PRINCESS!
HAH! AS IF THE PRINCESS WOULD BE OUT HERE ALONE IN THE WOODS!
NO! WAIT! YOU'VE GOT TO LISTEN TO ME...
GET HER!
!

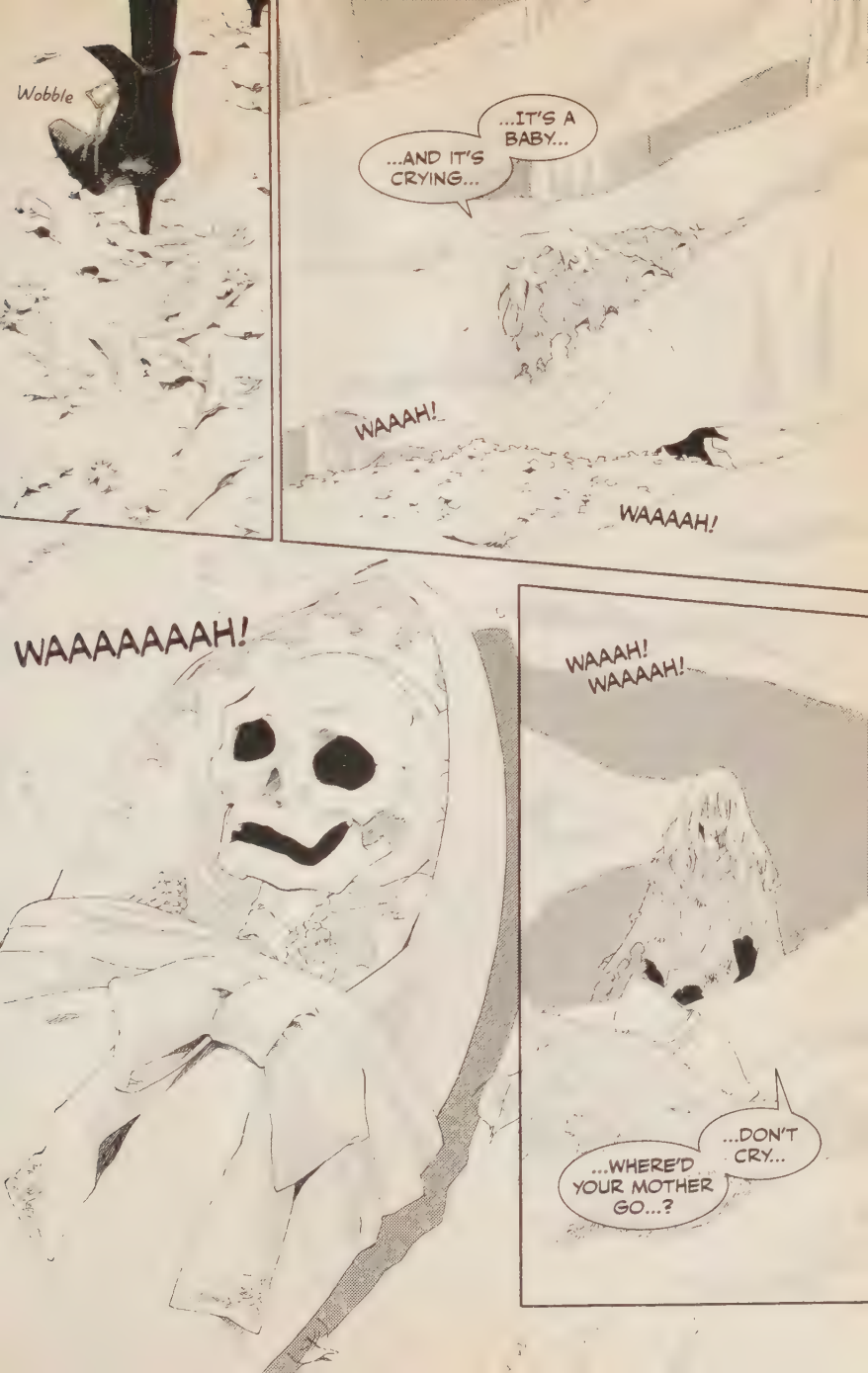
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
?!
!
ANGELS...
RUN! GET AWAY!
THE HUNTERS ARE COMING!
THERE'S A WOMAN HERE!
HE'S GOT A LITTLE FRIEND?
HUH-WHA?!
HUNTERS?
...AND HUMANS?!

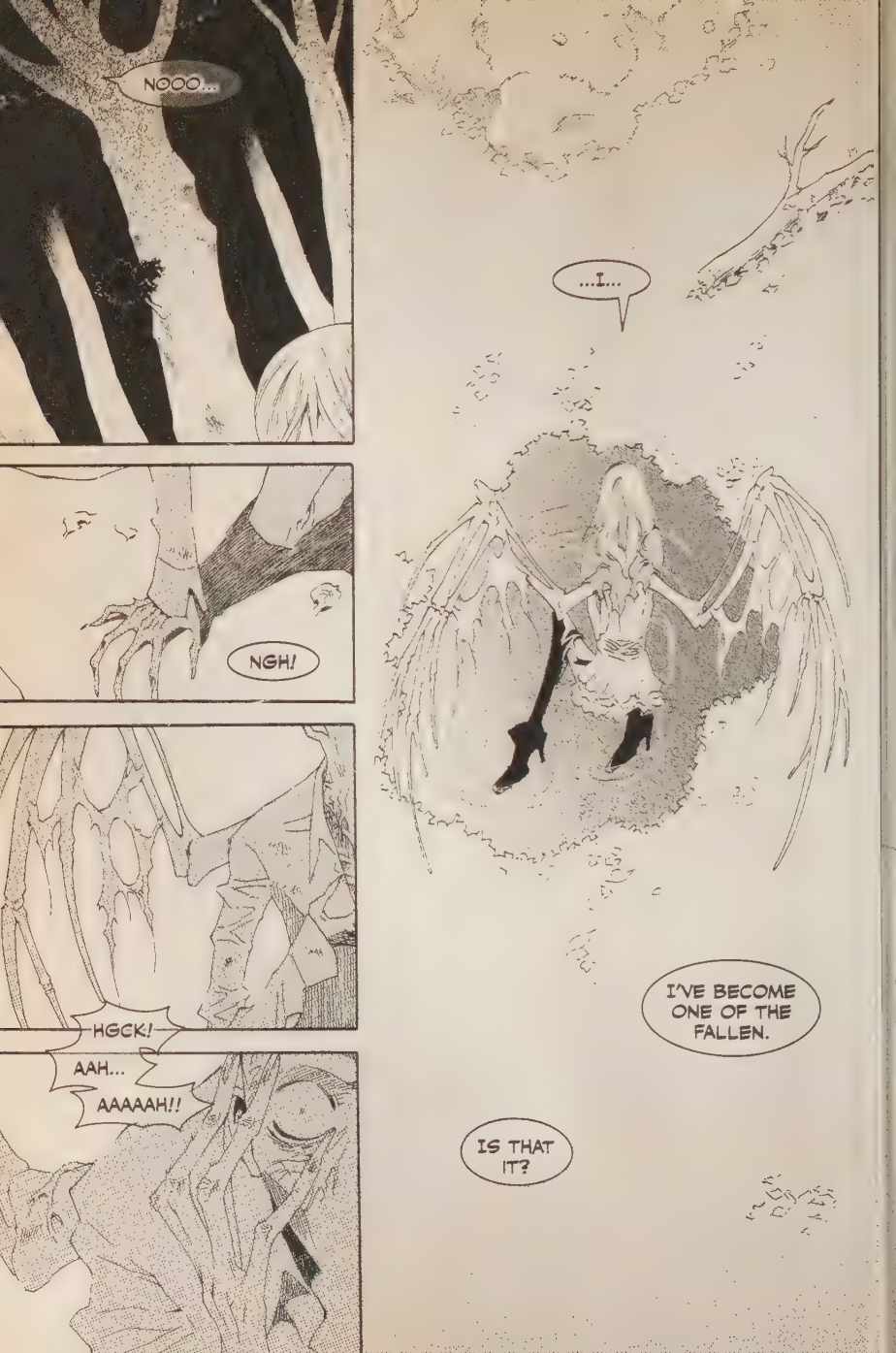

AAAH!
FWUD
NGH! OW!
HEY!!
HAM
SWISH
NICE. SHE IS AN ANGEL!
HER WINGS ARE A FUNNY COLOR, BUT THEY LOOK LIKE THEY'LL BLEED WELL ENOUGH.
!!


WAAAAAAAAH!
...WAAAAH!
WAAAH!
WAAAAAH!
WAAAH!!

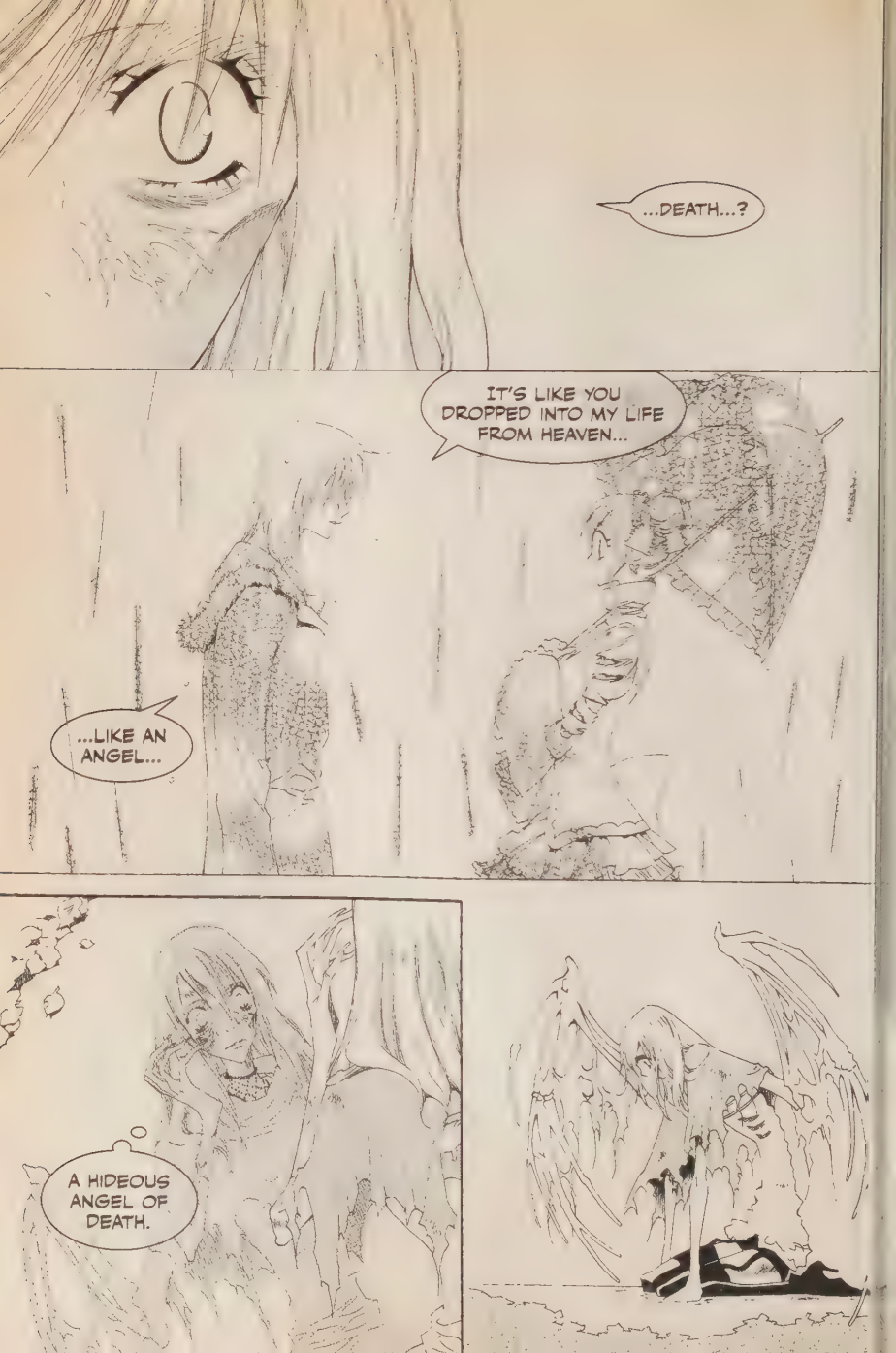

CLENCH
STOP! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
SLAAAH...
NOOOOOOO!!

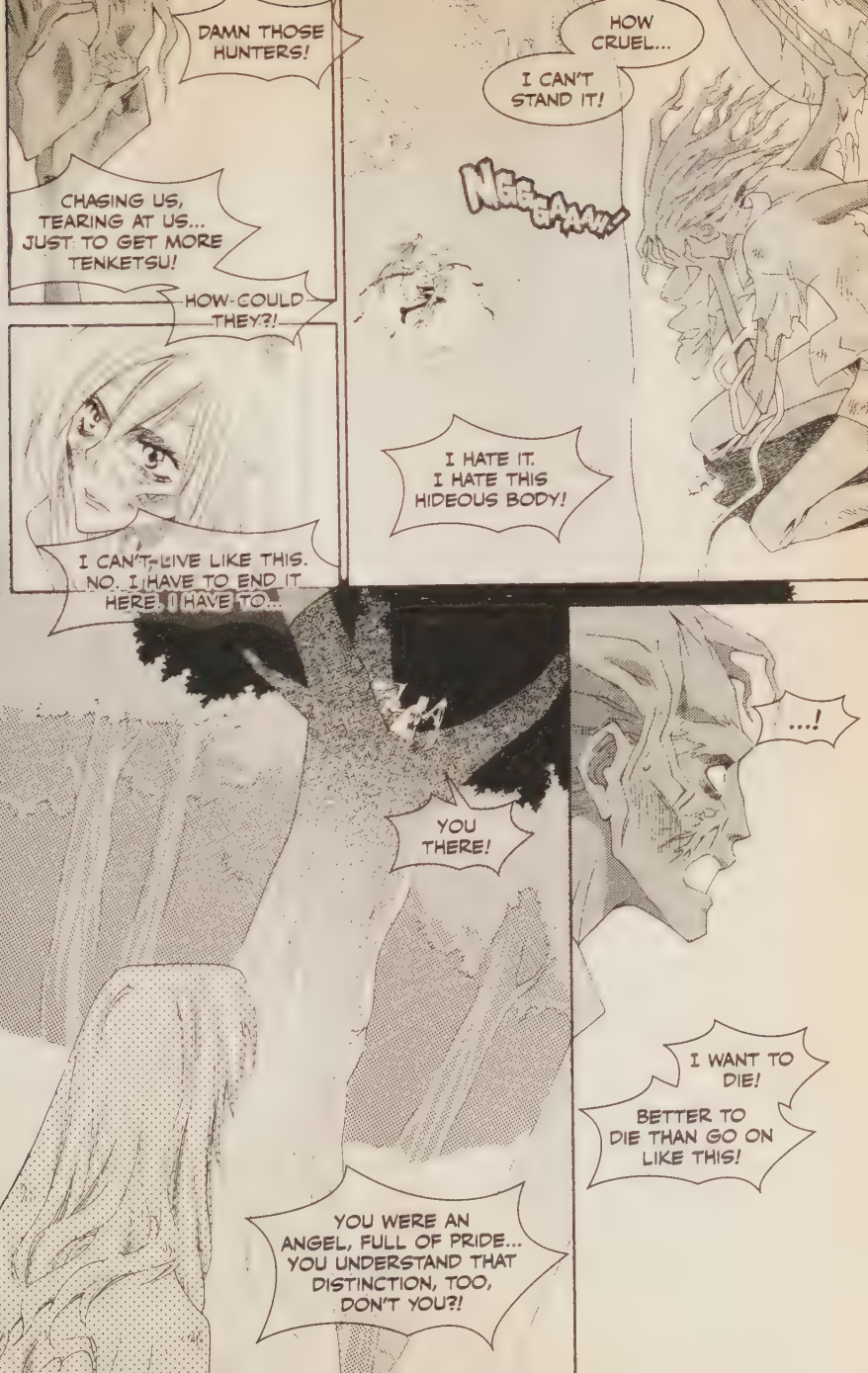
WAAAAAH!
GASP!
Twitch
EIYAA!

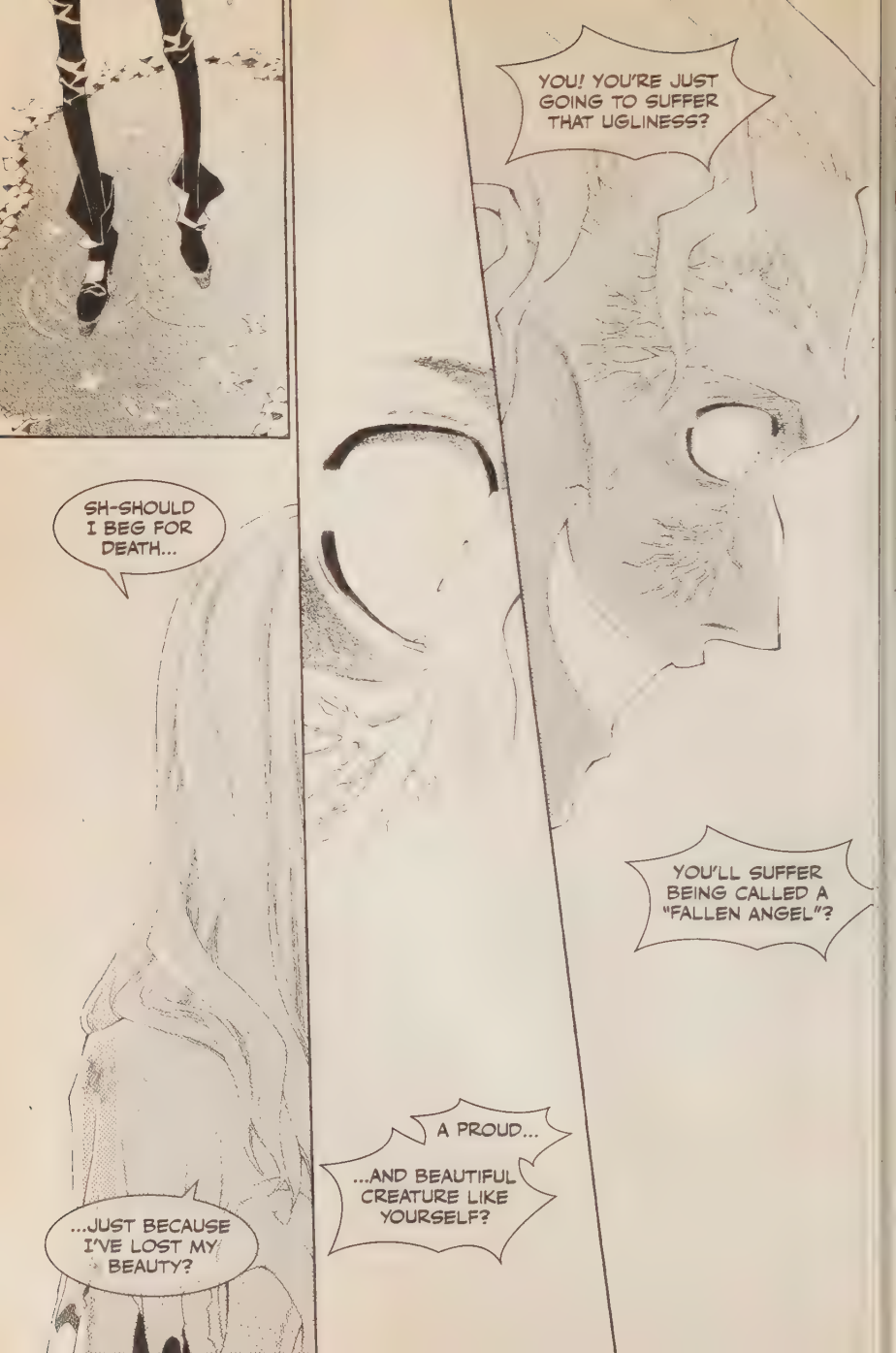

Wobble
...AND IT'S CRYING...
...IT'S A BABY...
WAAAH!
WAAAAH!
WAAAAAAAH!
WAAAH! WAAAAH!
...WHERE'D YOUR MOTHER GO...?
...DON'T CRY...

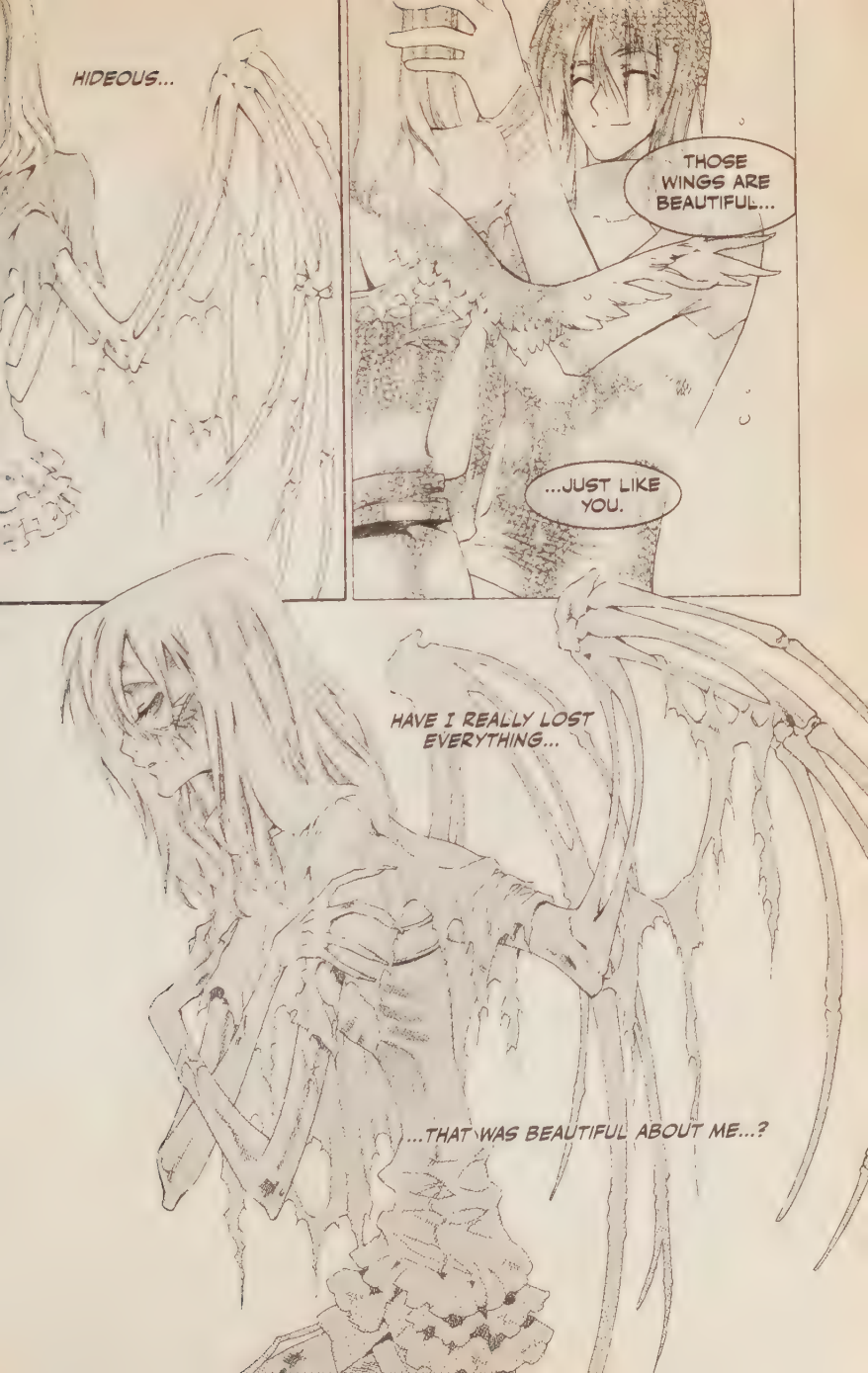

NOOO...
NGH!
HGCK!
AAH...
AAAAAH!!
...I...
I'VE BECOME ONE OF THE FALLEN.
IS THAT IT?

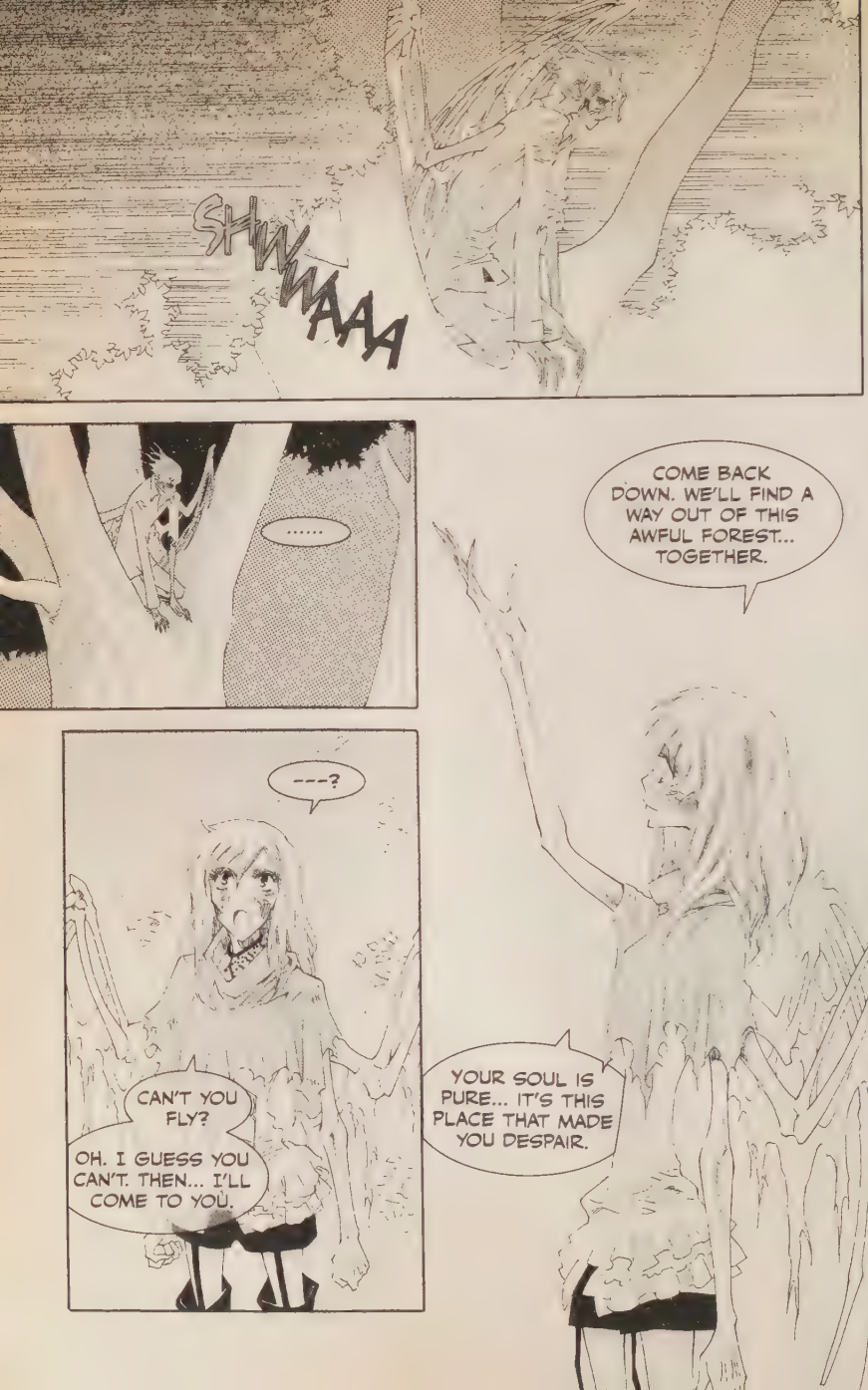
Glance
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
WHY?!
MY HANDS ARE NUMB...
THEY FEEL SO WOODEN...I...
Gasp!

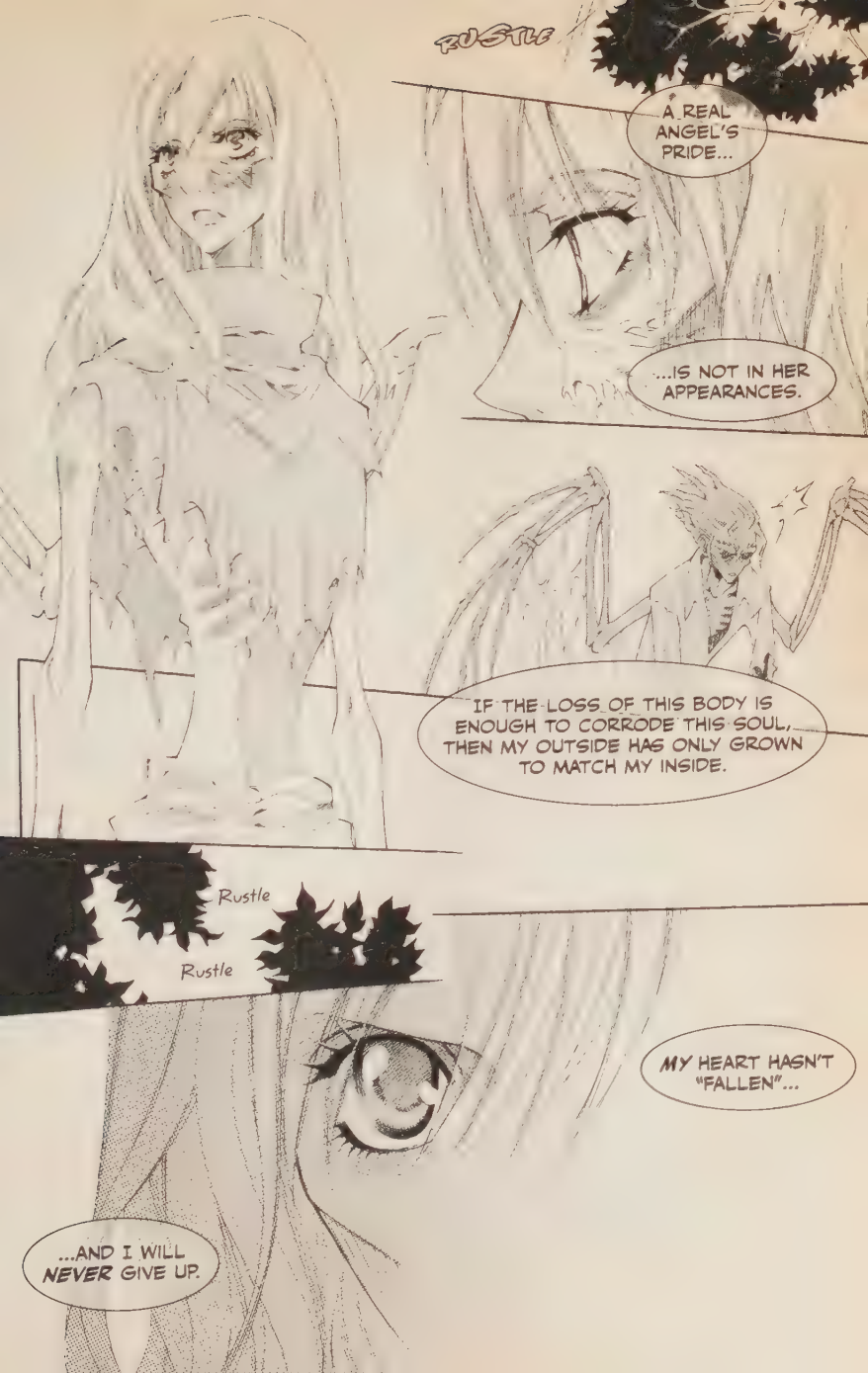

...DEATH...?
IT'S LIKE YOU DROPPED INTO MY LIFE FROM HEAVEN...
...LIKE AN ANGEL...
A HIDEOUS ANGEL OF DEATH.


DAMN THOSE HUNTERS!
CHASING US, TEARING AT US... JUST TO GET MORE TENKETSU!
HOW-COULD THEY?!
I CAN'T-LIVE LIKE THIS. NO. I HAVE TO END IT HERE. I HAVE TO...
HOW CRUEL...
I CAN'T STAND IT!
NGGGGAAAA!
I HATE IT. I HATE THIS HIDEOUS BODY!
...!
YOU THERE!
I WANT TO DIE!
BETTER TO DIE THAN GO ON LIKE THIS!
YOU WERE AN ANGEL, FULL OF PRIDE... YOU UNDERSTAND THAT DISTINCTION, TOO, DON'T YOU?!


YOU! YOU'RE JUST GOING TO SUFFER THAT UGLINESS?
SH-SHOULD I BEG FOR DEATH...
YOU'LL SUFFER BEING CALLED A "FALLEN ANGEL"?
A PROUD...
...AND BEAUTIFUL CREATURE LIKE YOURSELF?
...JUST BECAUSE I'VE LOST MY BEAUTY?

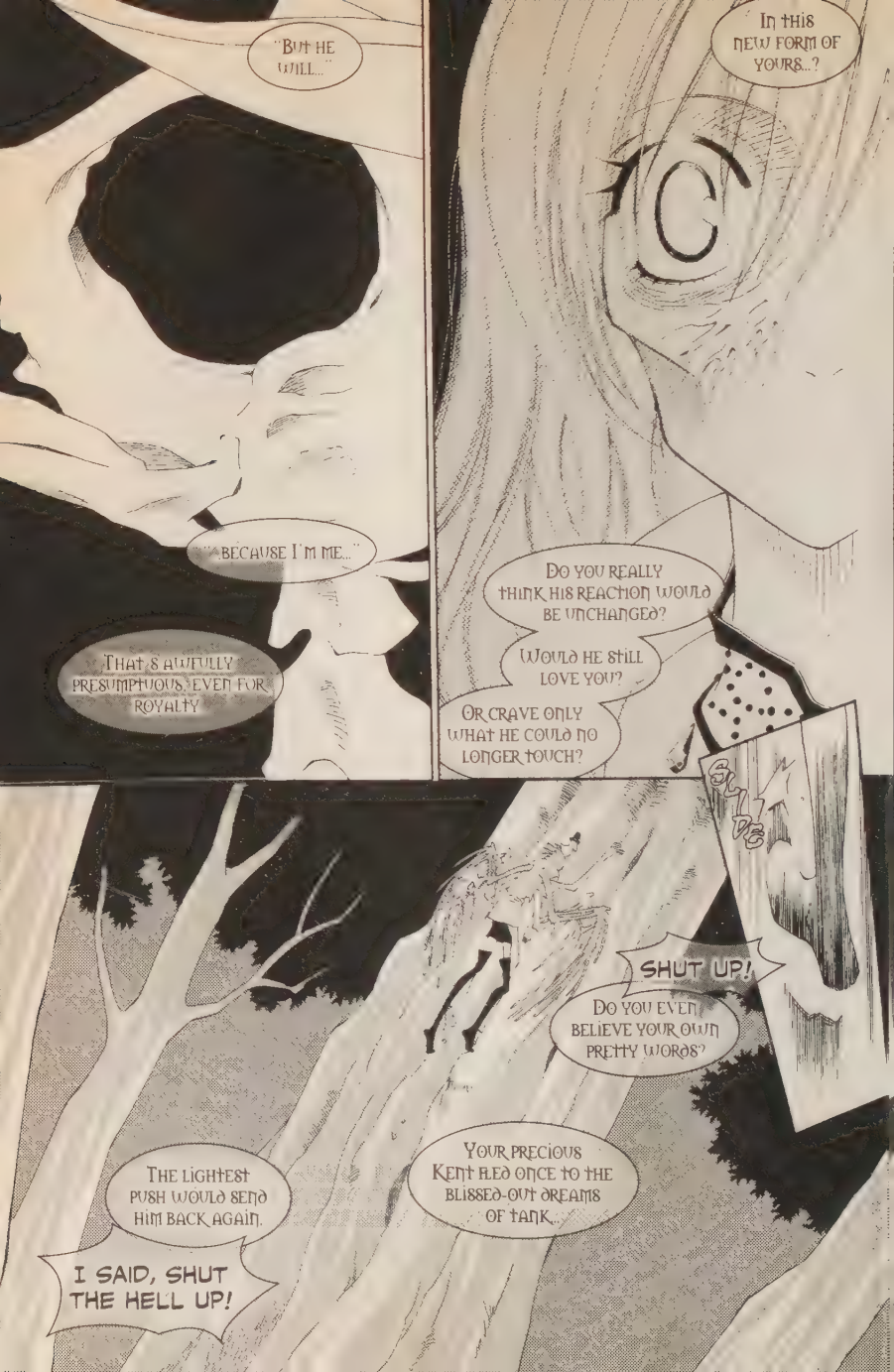

HIDEOUS...
THOSE WINGS ARE BEAUTIFUL...
...JUST LIKE YOU.
HAVE I REALLY LOST EVERYTHING...
...THAT WAS BEAUTIFUL ABOUT ME...?

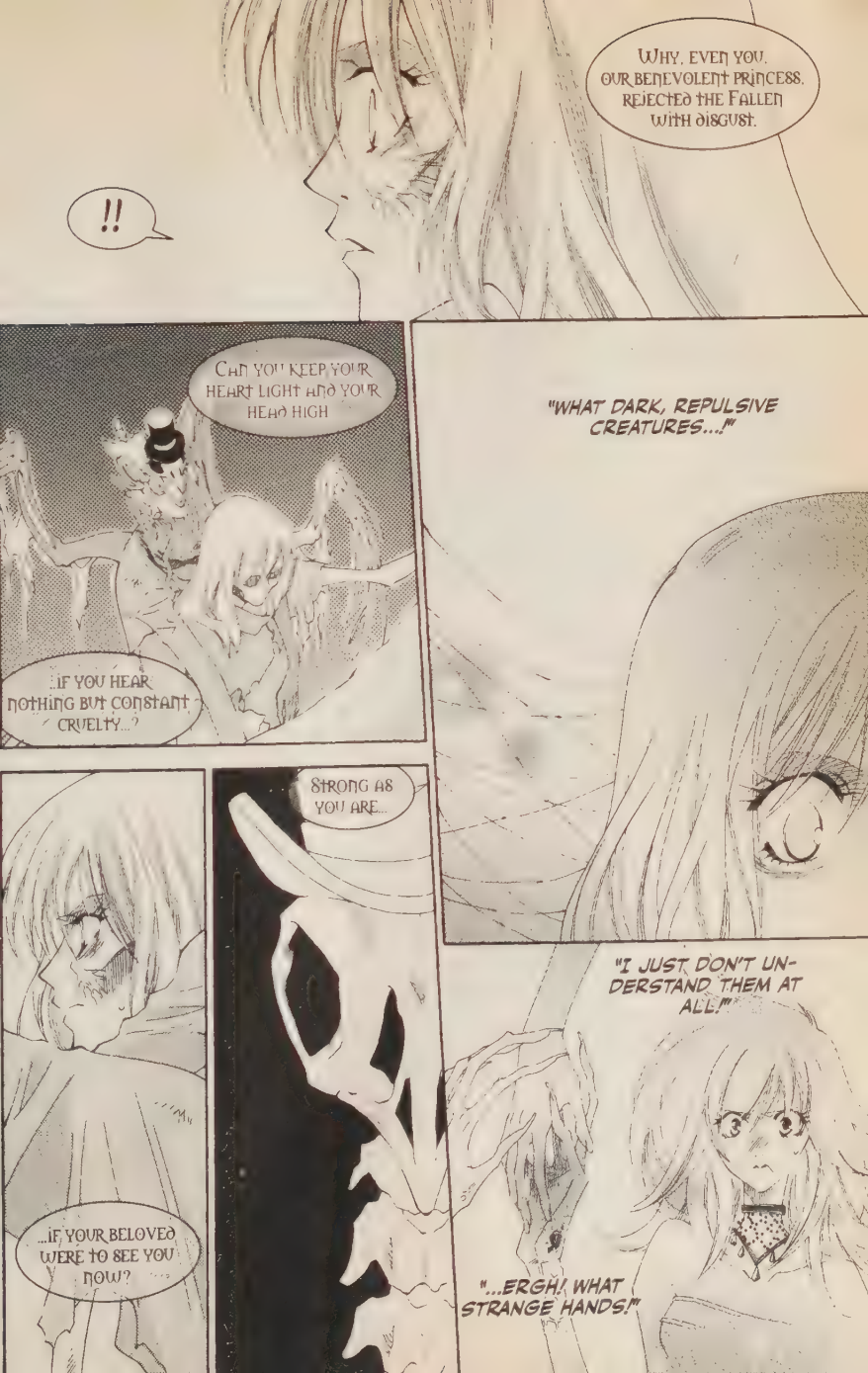

SHWAAA
.....
COME BACK DOWN. WE'LL FIND A WAY OUT OF THIS AWFUL FOREST... TOGETHER.
---?
CAN'T YOU FLY?
OH. I GUESS YOU CAN'T. THEN... I'LL COME TO YOU.
YOUR SOUL IS PURE... IT'S THIS PLACE THAT MADE YOU DESPAIR.


RUSTLE
A REAL ANGEL'S PRIDE...
...IS NOT IN HER APPEARANCES.
IF THE LOSS OF THIS BODY IS ENOUGH TO CORRODE THIS SOUL, THEN MY OUTSIDE HAS ONLY GROWN TO MATCH MY INSIDE.
Rustle
Rustle
MY HEART HASN'T "FALLEN"...
...AND I WILL NEVER GIVE UP.

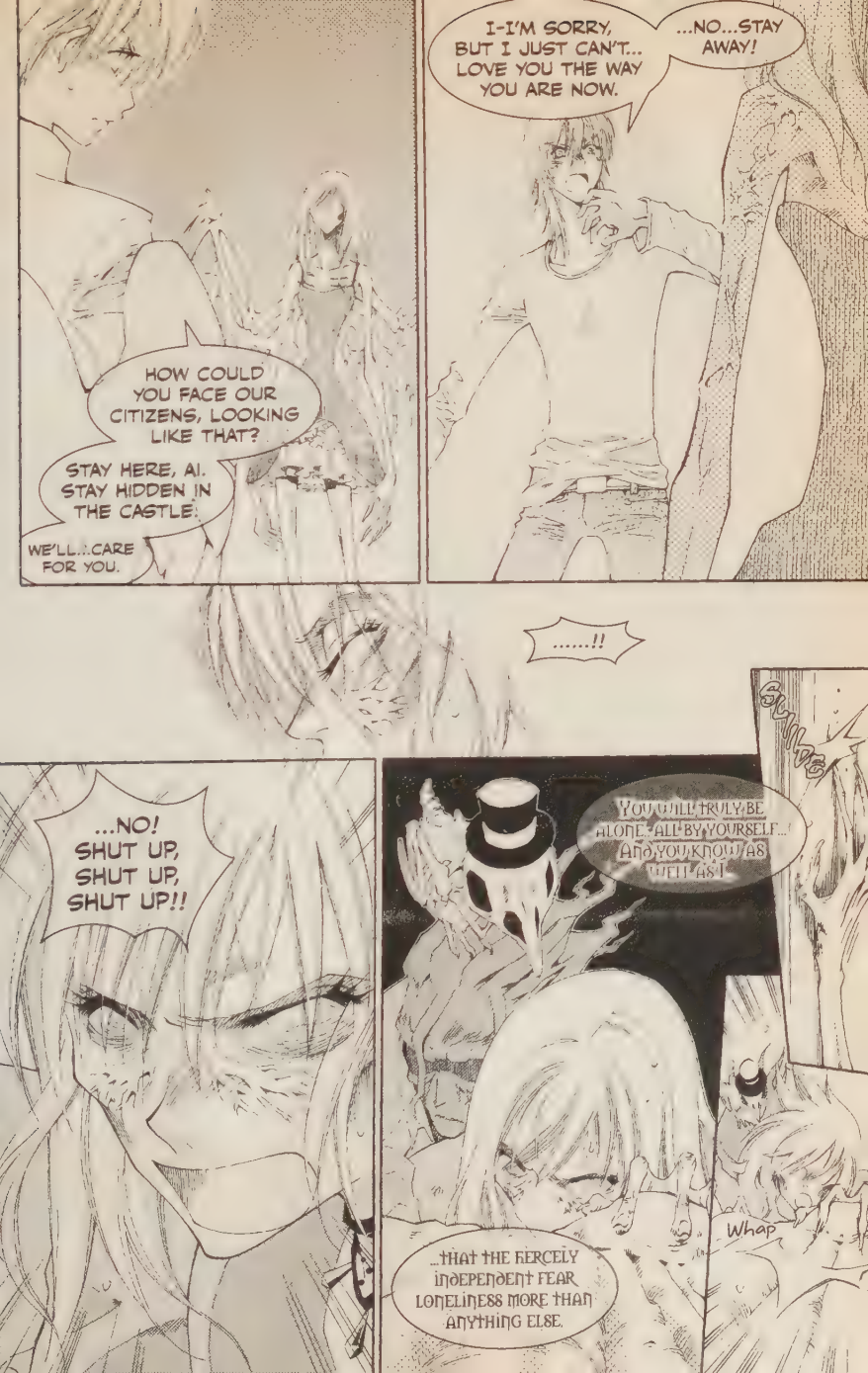
SO LIGHT... HE'S LITERALLY JUST SKIN AND BONES...
Rustle
FLAP
IT'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT.
JUST KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR DANGER, EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE.
TAK
DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT, PRINCESS? "EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE"?
WHEN THE MERE SIGHT OF YOU WILL INSPIRE SUCH FEAR AND SCORN?
Kah hah hah ha!

THAT WAS CLOSE.
AAAH!
Slip
KLUD
BUT I'VE GOT TO GET UP THERE!
SEE? IT'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT NOW.
JUST GRAB ON TO ME.
.....

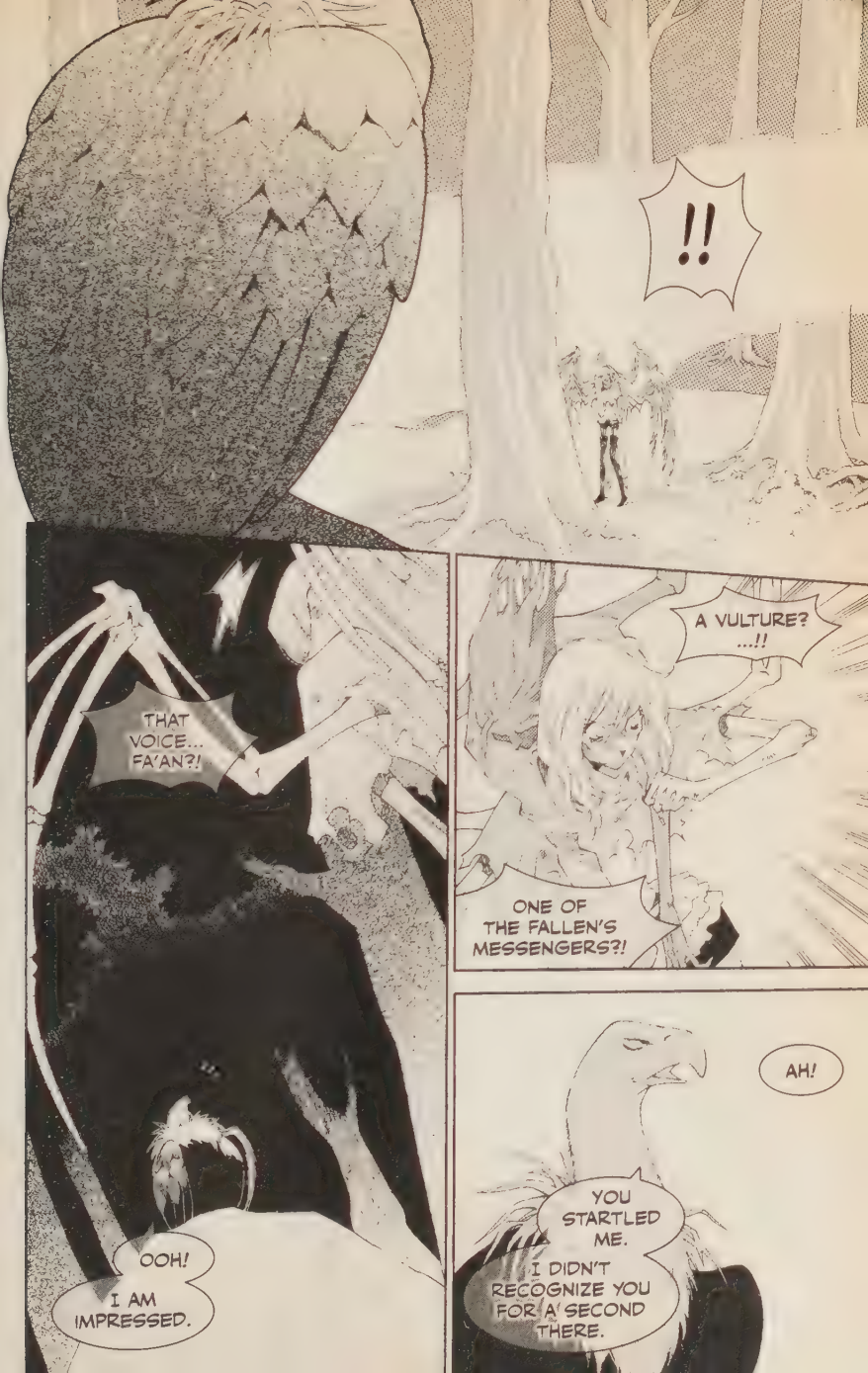

"But he will..."
"...because I'm me..."
That's awfully presumptuous, even for royalty.
In this new form of yours...?
Do you really think his reaction would be unchanged?
Would he still love you?
Or crave only what he could no longer touch?
SHUT UP!
Do you even believe your own pretty words?
Your precious Kent fled once to the blissed-out dreams of tank...
The lightest push would send him back again.
I said, SHUT THE HELL UP!


WHY, EVEN YOU, OUR BENEVOLENT PRINCESS, REJECTED THE FALLEN WITH DISGUST.
!!
CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HEART LIGHT AND YOUR HEAD HIGH
...IF YOU HEAR NOTHING BUT CONSTANT CRUELTY...?
"WHAT DARK, REPULSIVE CREATURES...!"
STRONG AS YOU ARE...
...IF YOUR BELOVED WERE TO SEE YOU NOW?
"I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM AT ALL!"
"...ERGH! WHAT STRANGE HANDS!"

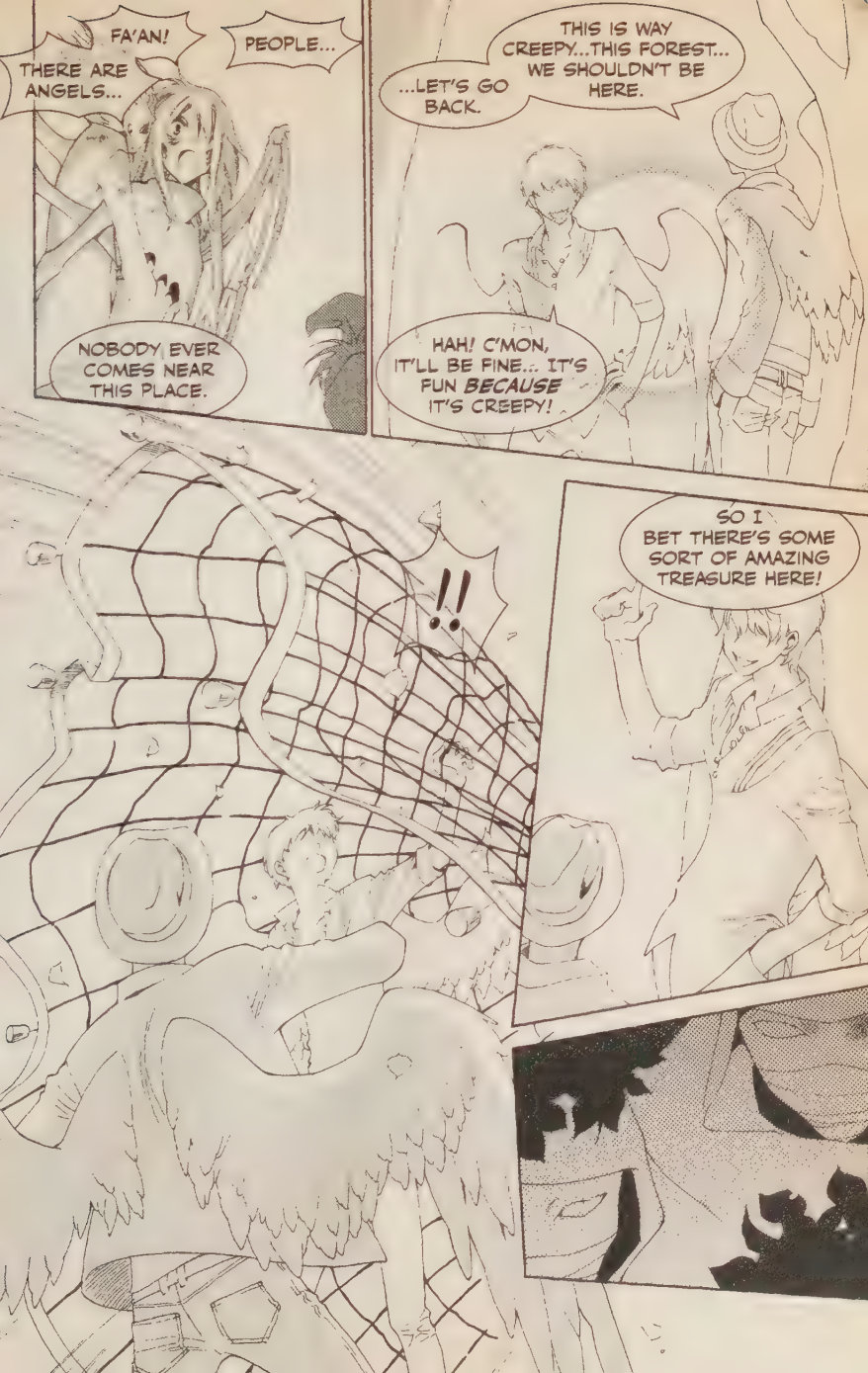
EVEN IF THEY SCREAM AND CRY...
...EVEN IF I END UP ALONE, CRUSHED BY MISERABLE SOLITUDE...
WHAT HAPPENS, HAPPENS! I'LL HANDLE IT.
I CAN'T CRY OVER WHAT HASN'T EVEN HAPPENED YET... AND MAY NEVER HAPPEN! I WON'T BE DRAGGED INTO DESPAIR AGAIN.
Phew...
CRUNCH

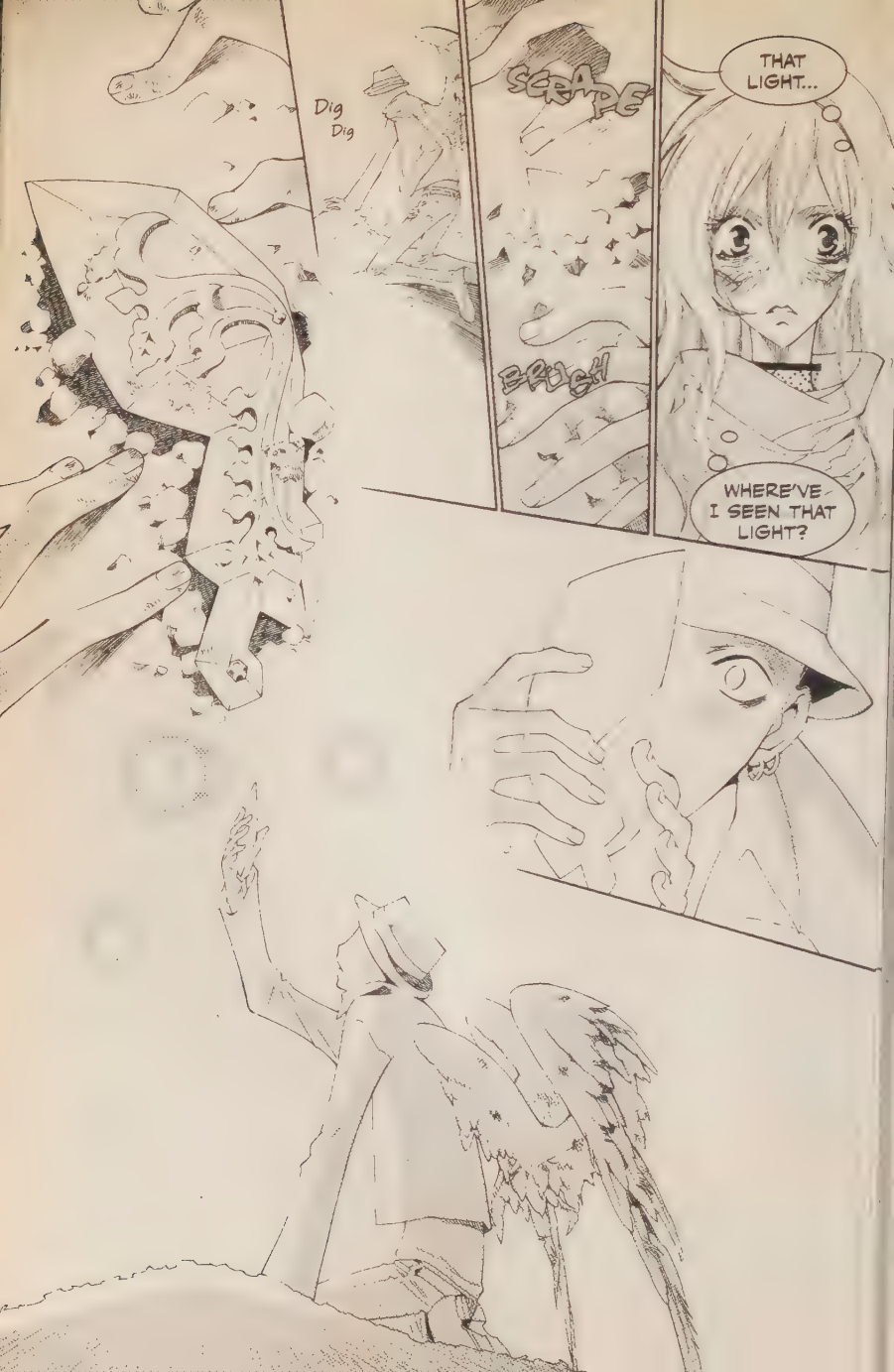

I-I'M SORRY, BUT I JUST CAN'T... LOVE YOU THE WAY YOU ARE NOW.
...NO...STAY AWAY!
HOW COULD YOU FACE OUR CITIZENS, LOOKING LIKE THAT?
STAY HERE, AI. STAY HIDDEN IN THE CASTLE.
WE'LL...CARE FOR YOU.
.....!!
...NO! SHUT UP, SHUT UP, SHUT UP!!
YOU WILL TRULY BE ALONE. ALL BY YOURSELF... AND YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I
Shuu
Whap
...THAT THE FIERCELY INDEPENDENT FEAR LONELINESS MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

NO... I MEAN... ...GET US OUT OF HERE! PLEASE...?!
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?! YOU SCARED ME TO DEATH, YOU--
Cower...
I CAN GIVE YOU A HINT, BUT... ...YOU HAVE TO FIND YOUR OWN ANSWERS.
I... I CAN'T DO THAT.
GLEAM
?!
Rustle Rustle
FA'AN...? ...WHAT'S WRONG? WHY ARE YOU SO NERVOUS?


!!
A VULTURE? ...!!
ONE OF THE FALLEN'S MESSENGERS?!
THAT VOICE... FA'AN?!
AH!
YOU STARTLED ME.
I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU FOR A SECOND THERE.
OOH!
I AM IMPRESSED.

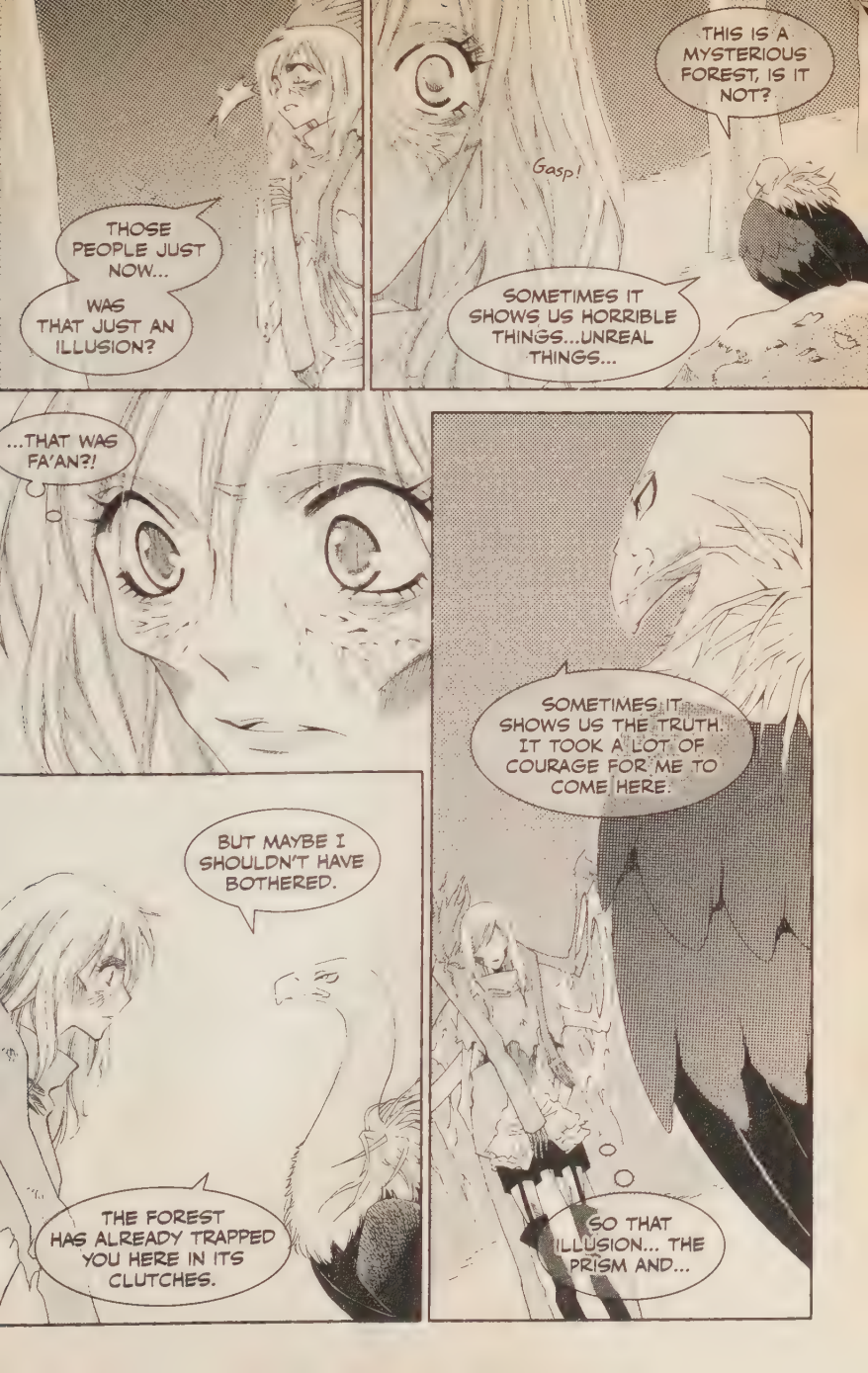
NGGAAAAH!!
!
IT'S THE HUNTERS! RUN!
WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!
Slither
NO! STOP! STOP!
JUST STOP IT! IT'S TOO HORRIBLE!
IT'S TOO AWFUL!
AFTER HIM!
swish
HEY! ONE OF THEM'S GETTING AWAY!
!!

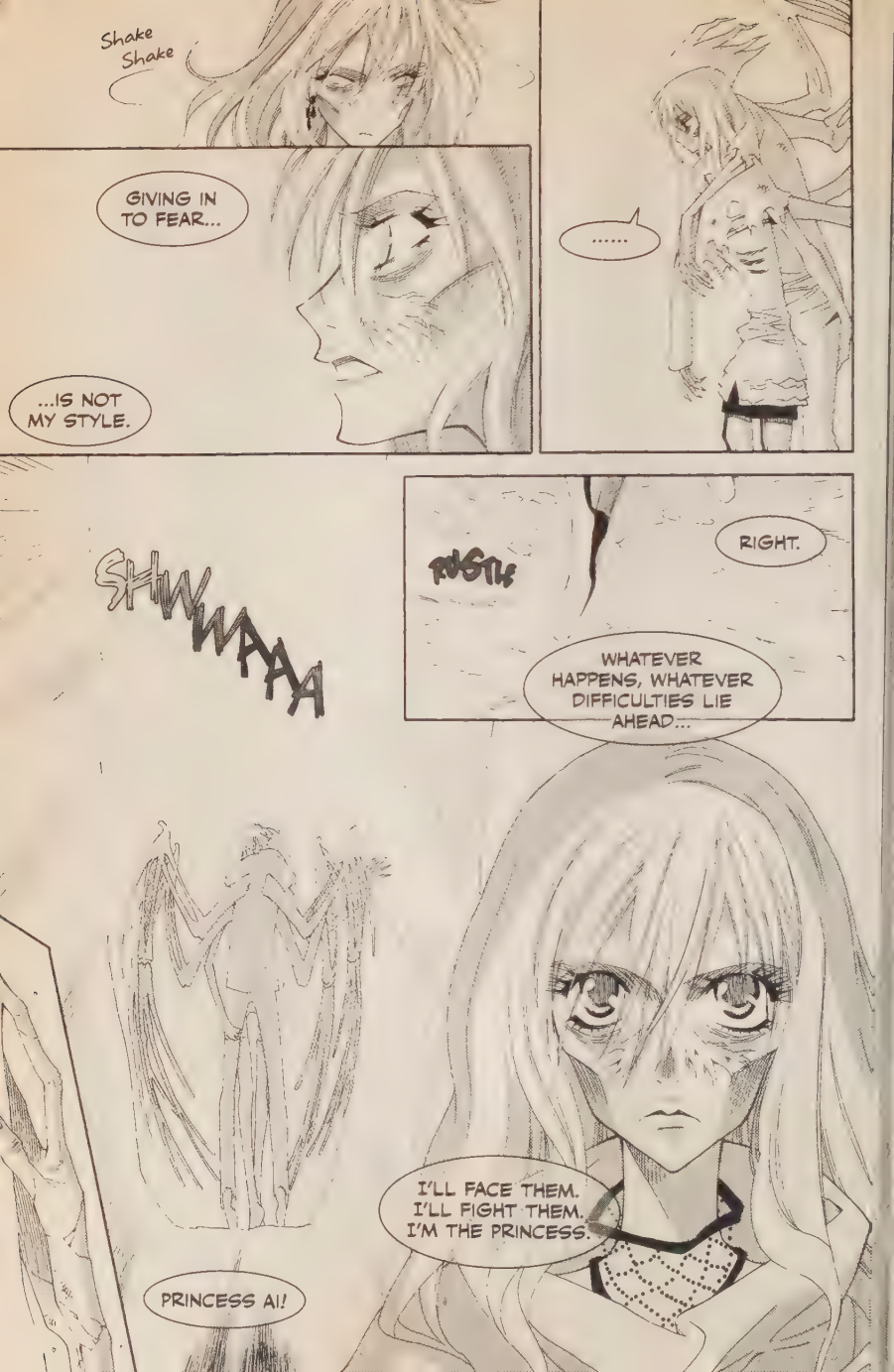

FA'AN!
PEOPLE...
THERE ARE ANGELS...
NOBODY EVER COMES NEAR THIS PLACE.
THIS IS WAY CREEPY...THIS FOREST... WE SHOULDN'T BE HERE.
...LET'S GO BACK.
HAH! C'MON, IT'LL BE FINE... IT'S FUN *BECAUSE* IT'S CREEPY!
!!
SO I BET THERE'S SOME SORT OF AMAZING TREASURE HERE!

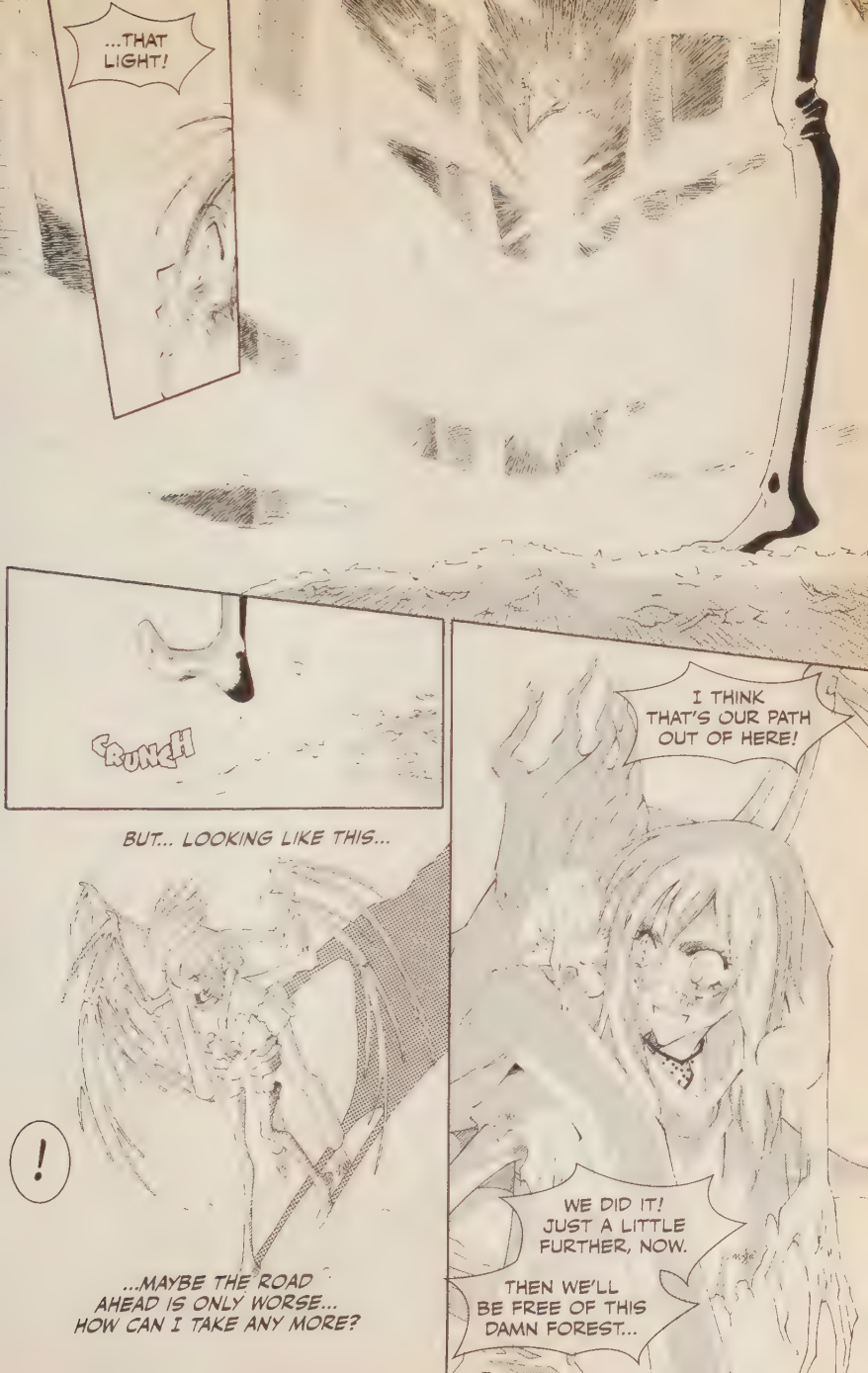

Dig
Dig
SCRAPE
BRUSH
THAT LIGHT...
WHERE'VE I SEEN THAT LIGHT?

Run
run
DAMMIT! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT OUR HORSES!

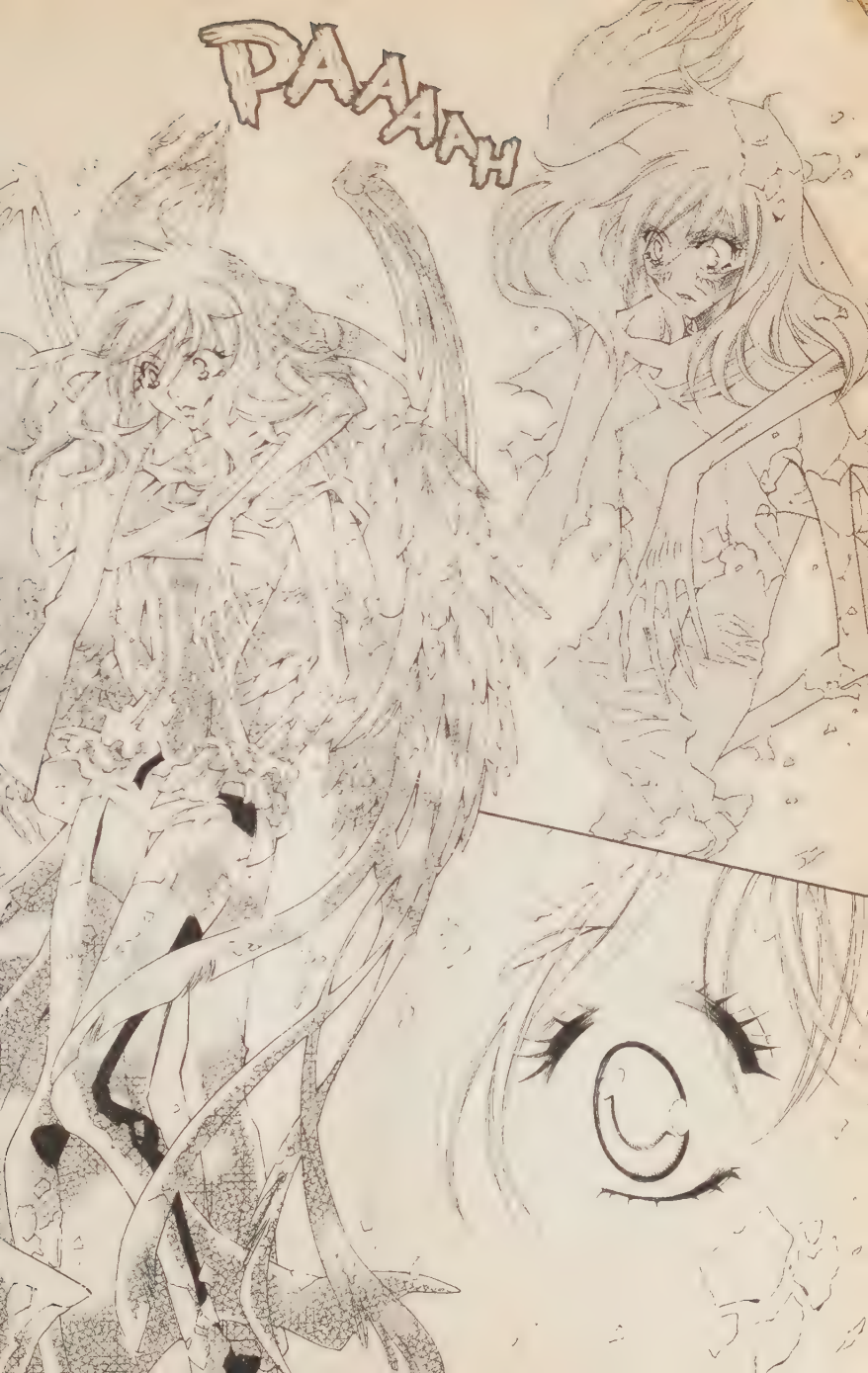
THE TRUE MONSTERS THAT YOU MUST FACE...
...ARE YET TO COME.
"TRAPPED"? WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!
WELL, GOOD LUCK TO YOU.
WAIT!!
DAMMIT, WHY-ARE-YOU ALWAYS LIKE THIS?!
FLAP FLAP FLAP
SEE YA~!
AH!
FA'AN!


THOSE PEOPLE JUST NOW...
WAS THAT JUST AN ILLUSION?
Gasp!
THIS IS A MYSTERIOUS FOREST, IS IT NOT?
SOMETIMES IT SHOWS US HORRIBLE THINGS...UNREAL THINGS...
...THAT WAS FA'AN?!
SOMETIMES IT SHOWS US THE TRUTH. IT TOOK A LOT OF COURAGE FOR ME TO COME HERE.
BUT MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE BOTHERED.
THE FOREST HAS ALREADY TRAPPED YOU HERE IN ITS CLUTCHES.
SO THAT ILLUSION... THE PRISM AND...


Shake Shake
GIVING IN TO FEAR...
...IS NOT MY STYLE.
.....
RUSTLE
RIGHT.
WHATEVER HAPPENS, WHATEVER DIFFICULTIES LIE AHEAD...
SHWAAA
I'LL FACE THEM. I'LL FIGHT THEM. I'M THE PRINCESS.
PRINCESS AI!

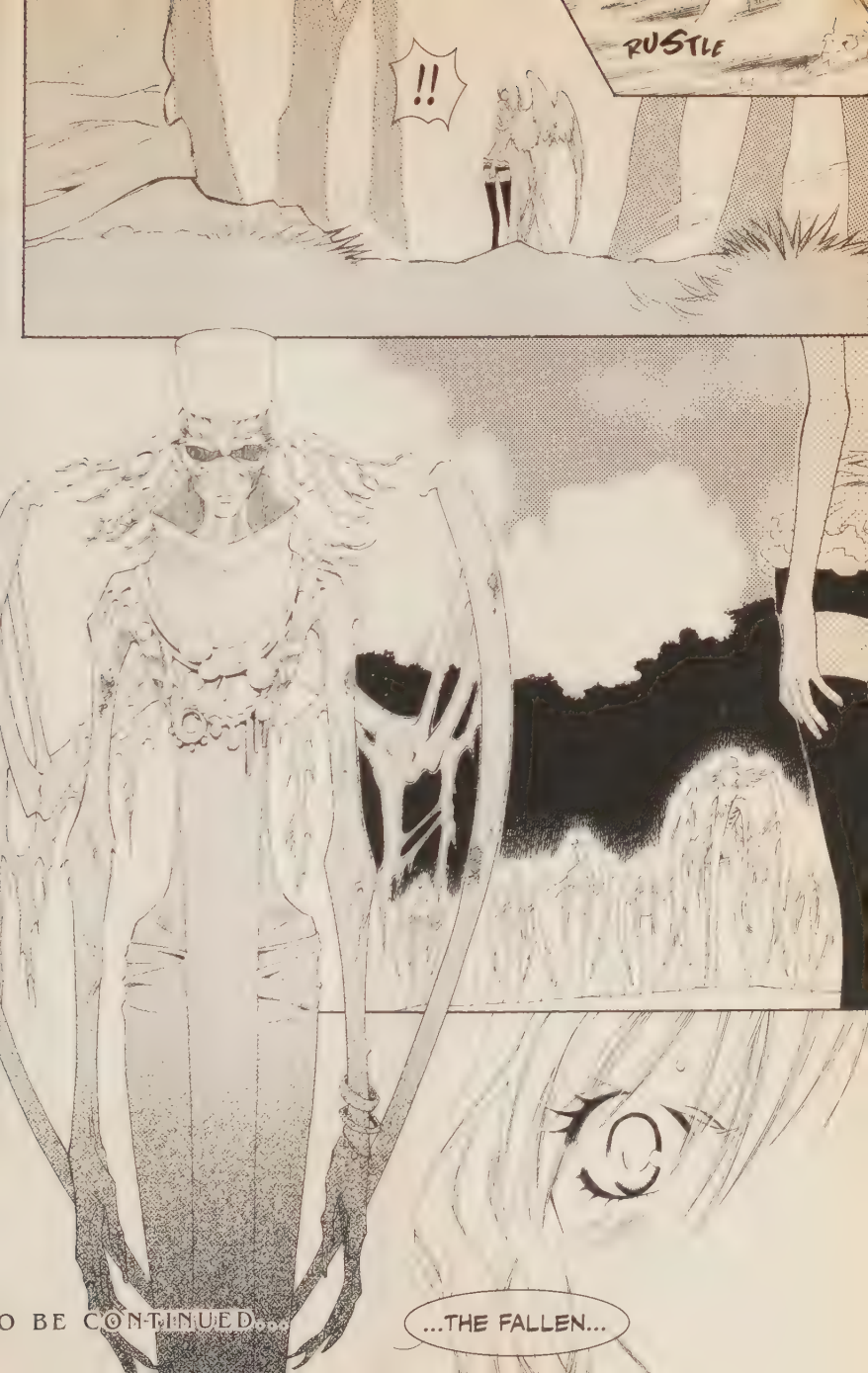

...THAT LIGHT!
CRUNCH
BUT... LOOKING LIKE THIS...
!
...MAYBE THE ROAD AHEAD IS ONLY WORSE... HOW CAN I TAKE ANY MORE?
I THINK THAT'S OUR PATH OUT OF HERE!
WE DID IT! JUST A LITTLE FURTHER, NOW.
THEN WE'LL BE FREE OF THIS DAMN FOREST...

WHAT THE...?!
!!
NO...
WAIT!
BUT... WHY?!
WHY...?
AND WHAT NOW?


PAAAAH

IN THE NEXT

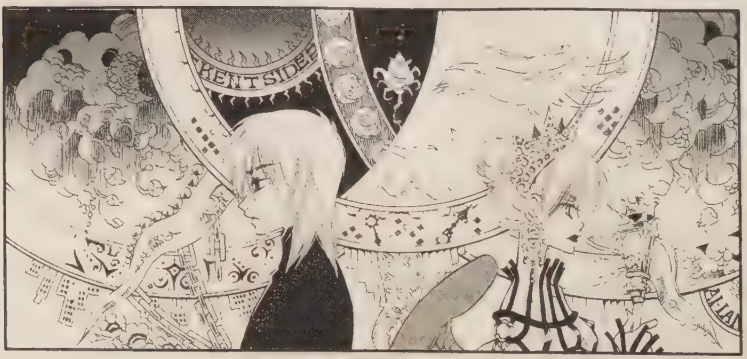
AI CONFRONTS HORRORS SHE NEVER IMAGINED, FACING DOWN THE FALLEN AND THEIR MALEVOLENT LEADER IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO BRING TRUE PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING TO HER RAVAGED HOMELAND. KENT AND NORA DO THEIR PART TO RALLY AI-LAND TO COME TO THE AID OF THE WOMAN WHO IS SO SPECIAL TO BOTH OF THEM, BUT WILL THEIR EFFORTS BE ENOUGH? THE EPIC OF THE PRISM OF MIDNIGHT DAWN COMES TO ITS THRILLING CONCLUSION!


RUSTLE
!!
...THE FALLEN...
O BE CONTINUED...

TURN THIS PAGE, AI-LANDER, AND YOU WILL FIND YOURSELF ENJOYING A VERY SPECIAL SHORT STORY BY THE INCREDIBLY TALENTED KUJIRADOU-SENSEI. IF YOU WERE WONDERING WHAT KENT WAS UP TO DURING AI'S YEAR BACK IN AI-LAND BEFORE TAKESHI SIGNED HIM TO HTA AND HE HIT THE ROAD TO SUPER STARDOM, NOW'S YOUR CHANCE TO ENJOY A TASTE OF THAT, AS HE REFLECTS ON HIS RELATIONSHIP IN A VERY SURPRISING LOCATION.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN TOKYOPOP'S *PRINCESS AI: RUMORS FROM THE OTHER SIDE* ANTHOLOGY, THIS STORY HAS A COMPLEMENTARY SECTION, ALSO FROM THE AMAZING KUJIRADOU-SENSEI, THAT GIVES US AI'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE MATTER, SO CHECK OUT THE REST OF RUMORS WHEN YOU GET A CHANCE!

AND NOW, WE'RE THRILLED TO BRING YOU...
"AN AI-WITNESS ACCOUNT."



54 STEPS TO PARADISE

PRINCESS AI

DEMURE DELIVERANCE OF A SIMPLE PLAN
POTENT ISOLATION IN A WANTON LAND
CRAFTY SEDUCTION BY THE HOLY JAIL
FLORAL PRIMADONNA IN HER TARNISHED VEIL

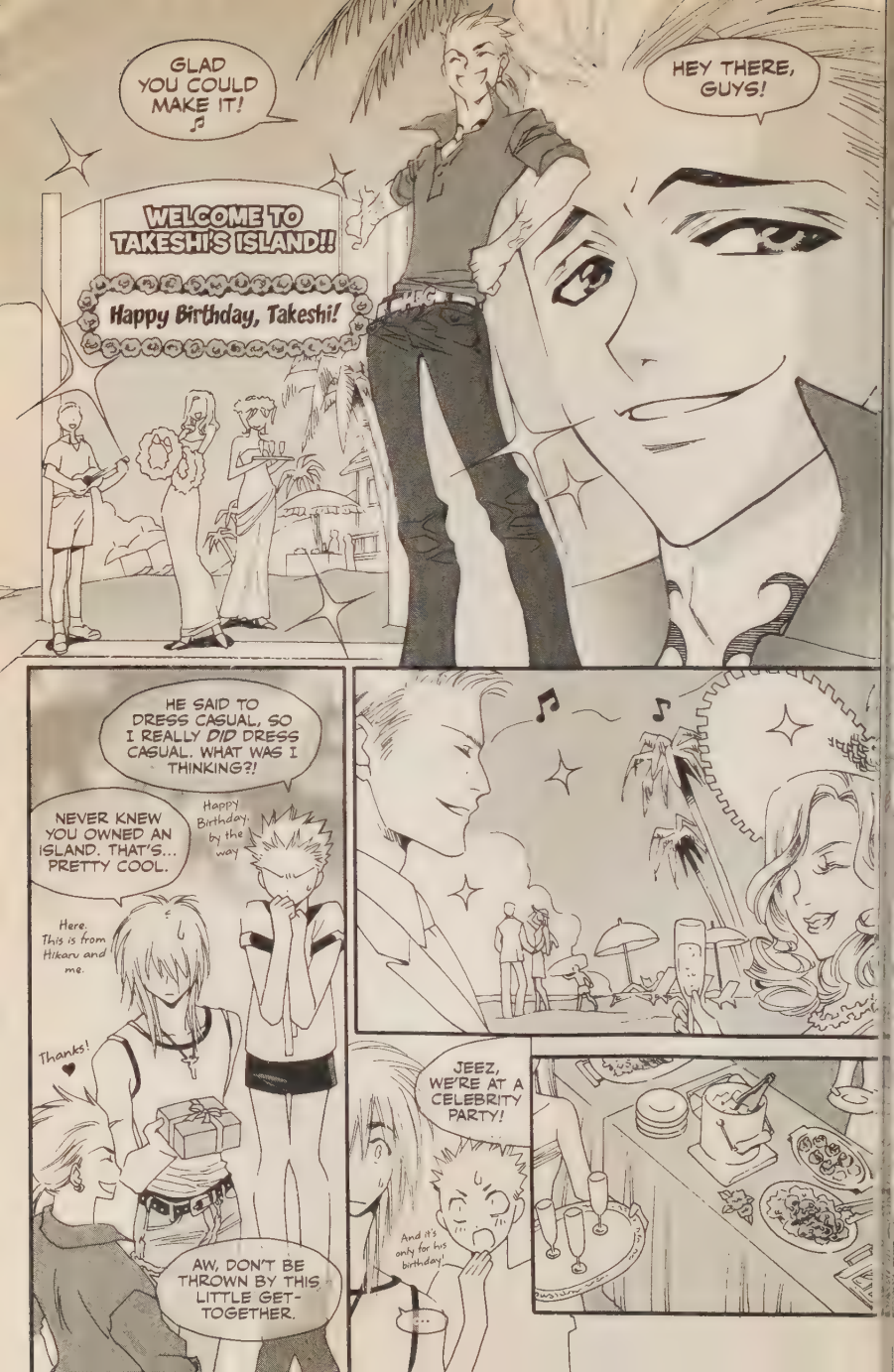
MY COMPANION
YOUR COMPROMISE
YOUR PARADIGM
MY PARADISE

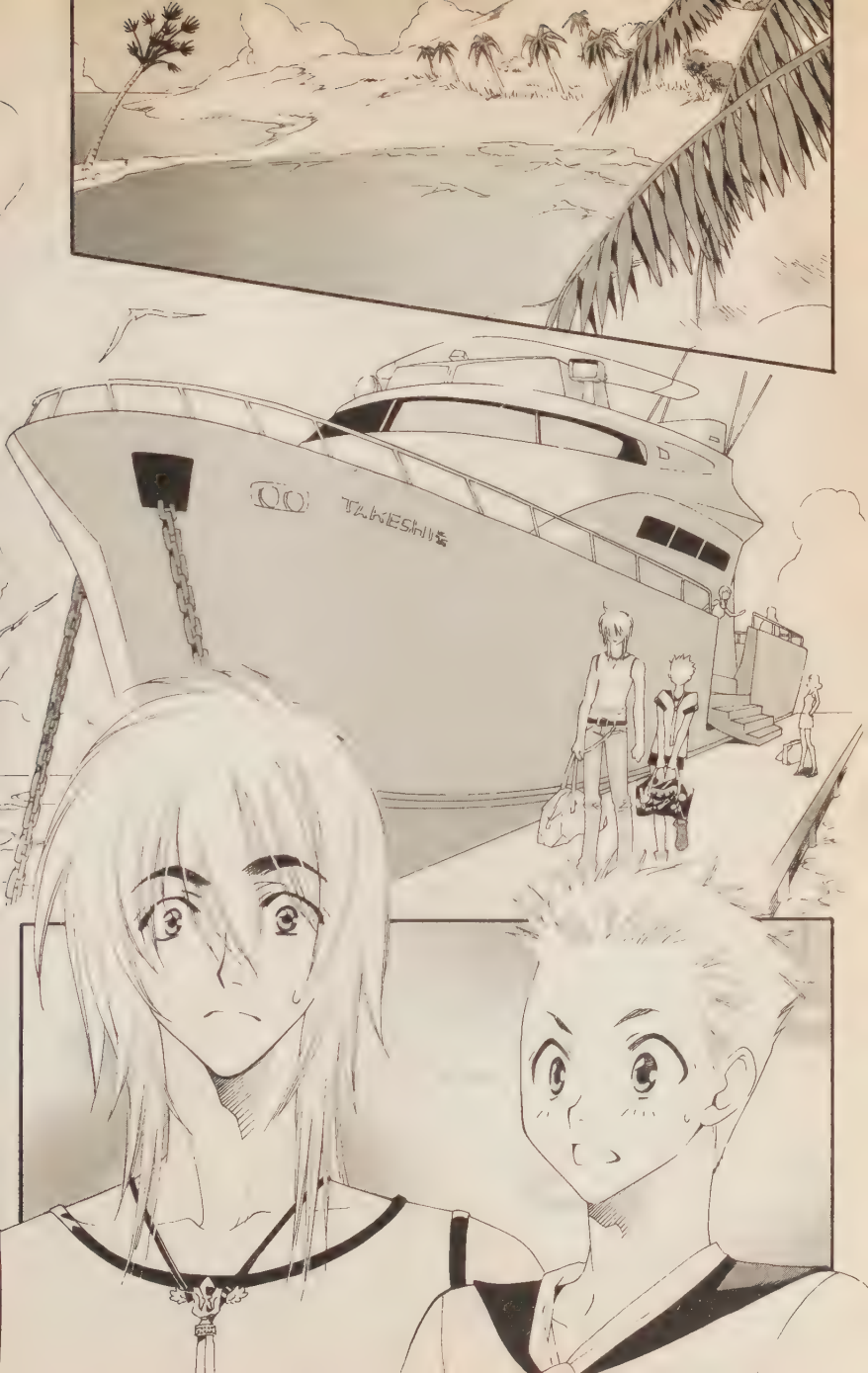
1…2…3…7
UNLOCK THE GATES TO HEAVEN
4…5…6…9
DREAMS YOU POSSESS OF MINE
8…9…10…12
DEEP INSIDE THE CAVE YOU DWELL
3…2…5…4
54 STEPS TO OPEN YOUR DOOR

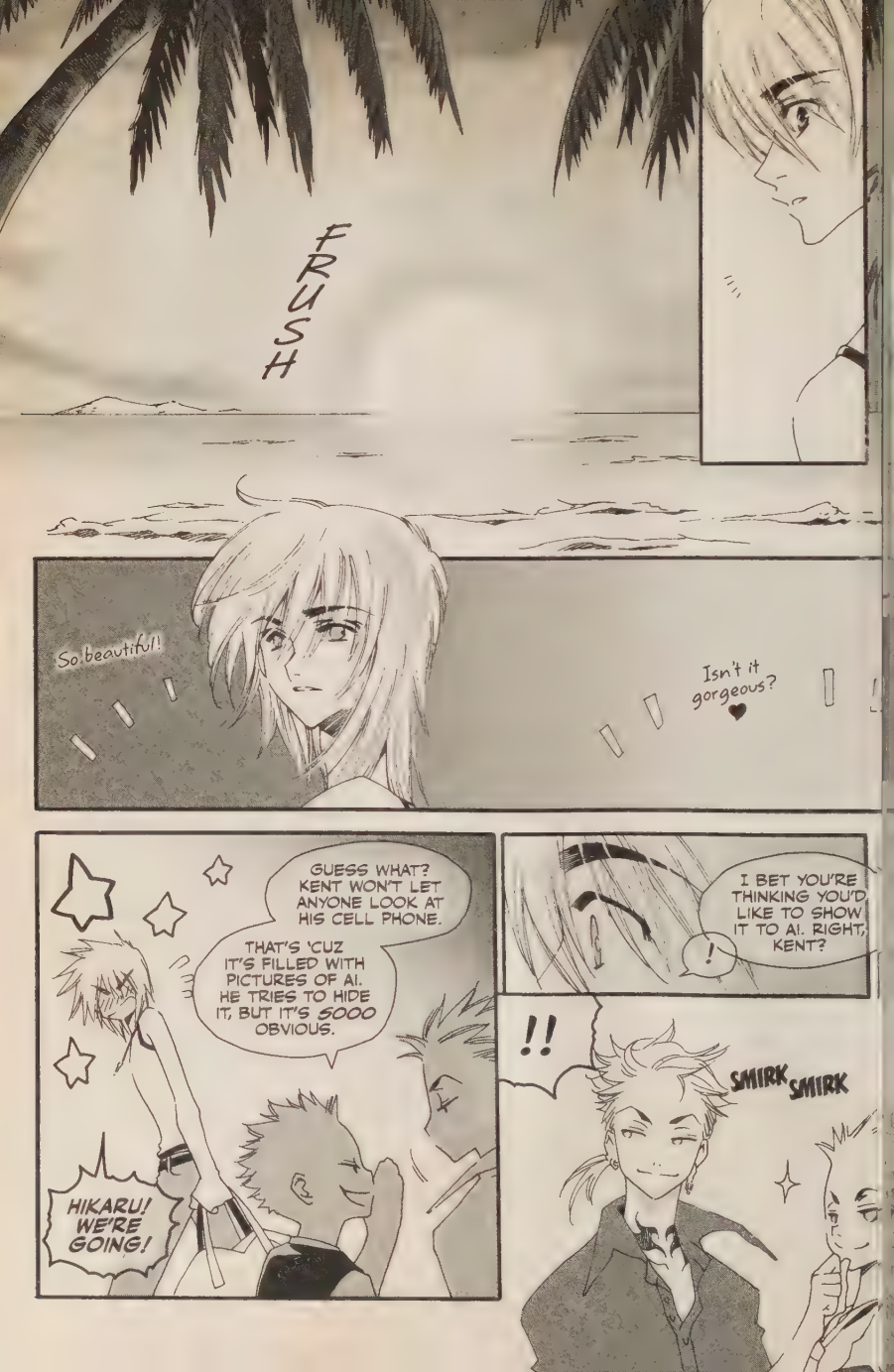
PLASTIC PRETENTIONS OF ORGANIC WASTE
TORRID HYPERBOLE IN A MANNER WELL-PLACED
DREARY HYPOCRISY BY THE RULING CLASS
SECRET INDULGENCE AMONGST SHATTERED GLASS

MY COMPANION
YOUR COMPROMISE
YOUR PARADIGM
MY PARADISE

1…2…3…7
UNLOCK THE GATES TO HEAVEN
4…5…6…9
DREAMS YOU POSSESS OF MINE
8…9…10…12
DEEP INSIDE THE CAVE YOU DWELL
3…2…5…4
54 STEPS TO OPEN YOUR DOOR


GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT! ♫
HEY THERE, GUYS!
WELCOME TO TAKESHI'S ISLAND!!
Happy Birthday, Takeshi!
HE SAID TO DRESS CASUAL, SO I REALLY DID DRESS CASUAL. WHAT WAS I THINKING?!
NEVER KNEW YOU OWNED AN ISLAND. THAT'S... PRETTY COOL.
Happy Birthday, by the way
Here. This is from Hikaru and me.
Thanks! ♥
AW, DON'T BE THROWN BY THIS LITTLE GET-TOGETHER.
JEEZ, WE'RE AT A CELEBRITY PARTY!
And it's only for his birthday!
...

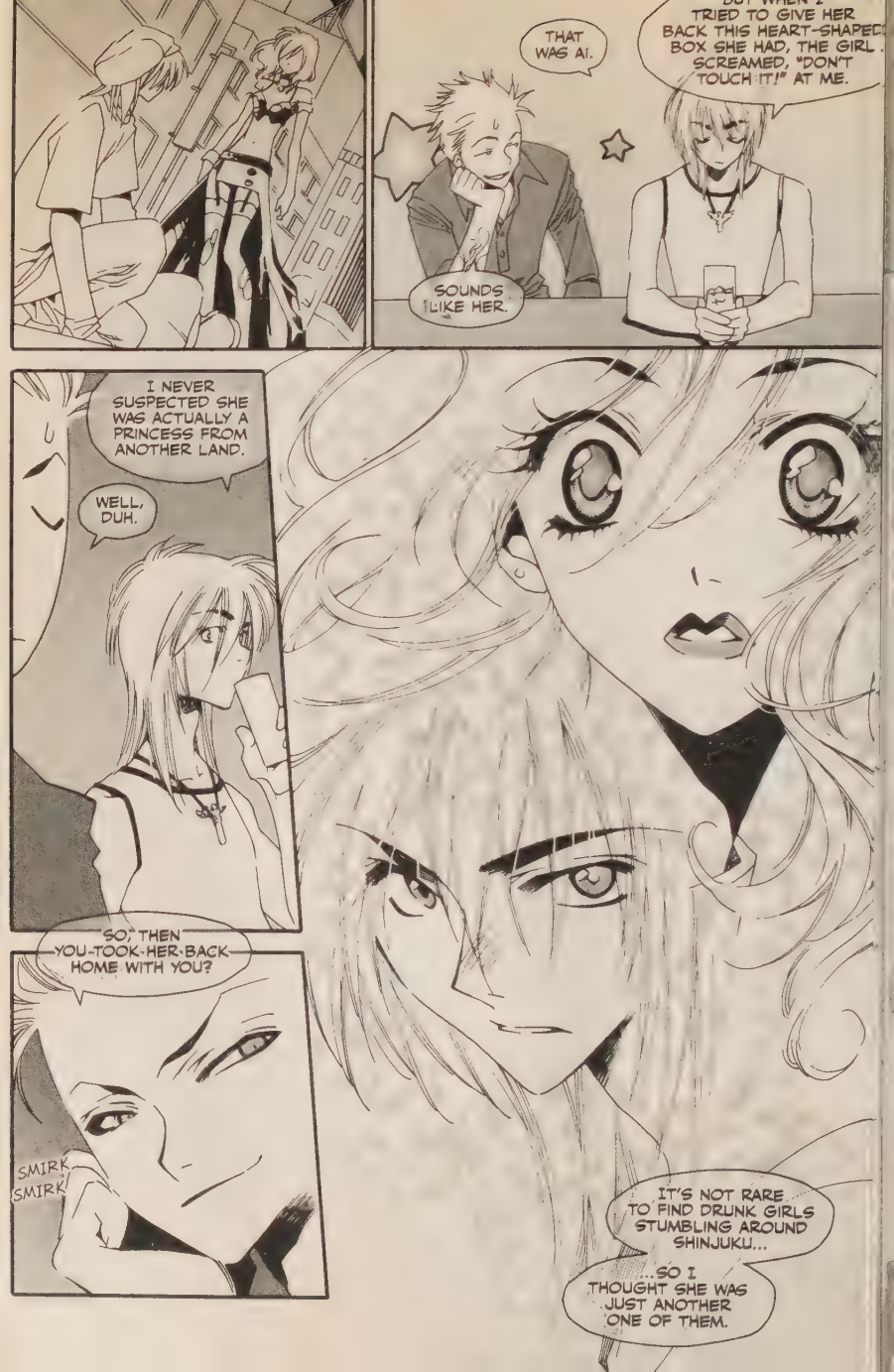

TAKESHI


FRUSH
So beautiful!
Isn't it gorgeous?
GUESS WHAT? KENT WON'T LET ANYONE LOOK AT HIS CELL PHONE.
THAT'S 'CUZ IT'S FILLED WITH PICTURES OF AI. HE TRIES TO HIDE IT, BUT IT'S SOOO OBVIOUS.
HIKARU! WE'RE GOING!
I BET YOU'RE THINKING YOU'D LIKE TO SHOW IT TO AI. RIGHT, KENT?
!
!!
SMIRK SMIRK

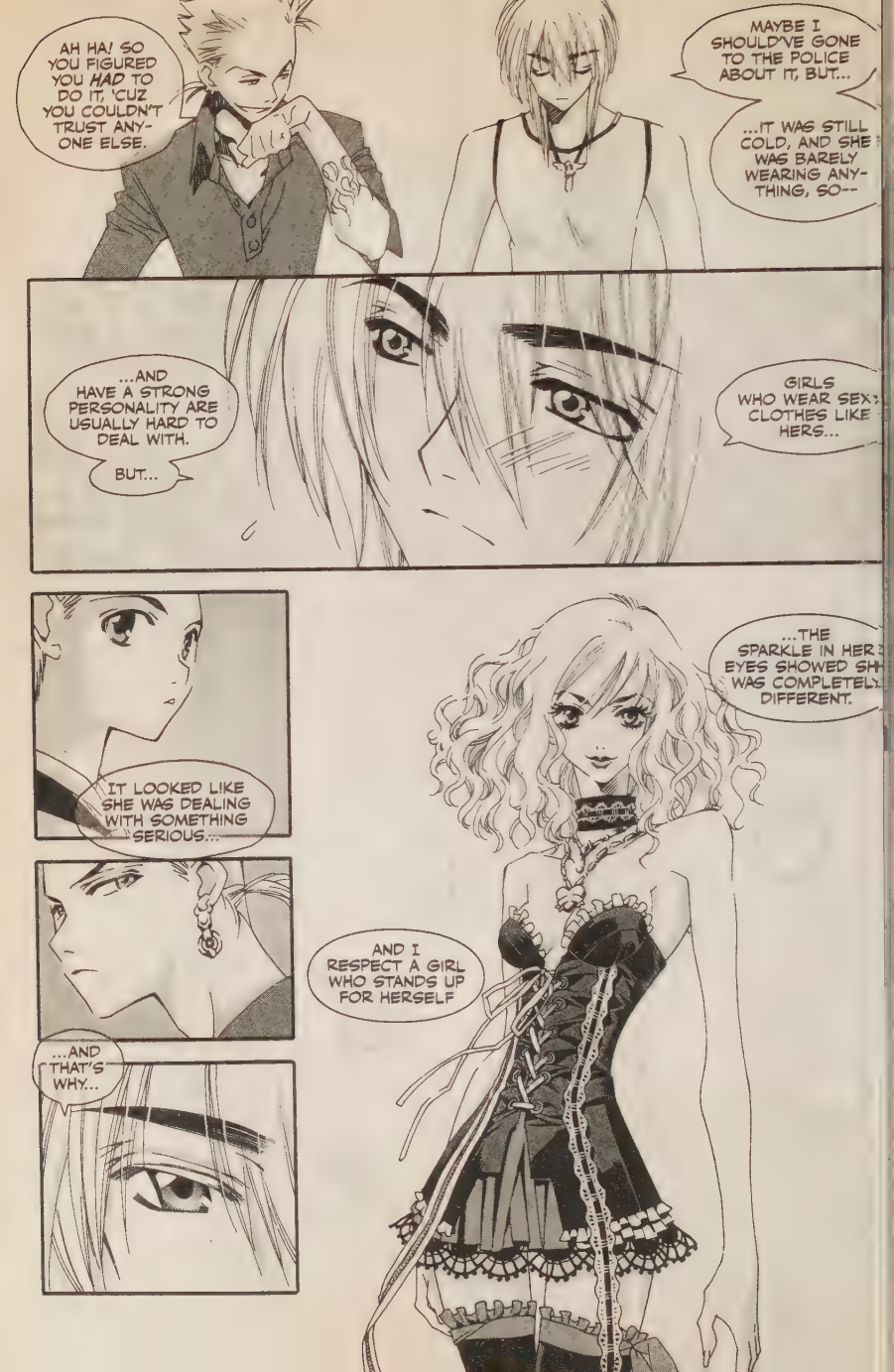
WHO'D HAVE GUESSED AI WOULD CONTINUE TO SELL SO WELL THAT EVEN AN EMPLOYEE COULD BUY HIS OWN ISLAND?!
AFTER ALL, IT'S ONLY POSSIBLE THANKS TO AI. I'VE MADE A BUNDLE OFF OF HER PRINCESS AI PERSONA.
AI...
BY THE WAY, TAKESHI-SAN!
HM?
GRAB
I'M BUNKING WITH KENT TONIGHT, RIGHT? RIIIIGHT?
SEPARATE ROOMS...
HEY, EVERYONE! LOOK AT THAT SUNSET!
YOU'RE MY CLOSEST FRIENDS.
PLEASE, MAKE YOURSELVES COMFORTABLE.
I'LL BE SCREENING THE NEWEST PRINCESS AI MUSIC VIDEO TONIGHT, SO DON'T MISS IT!

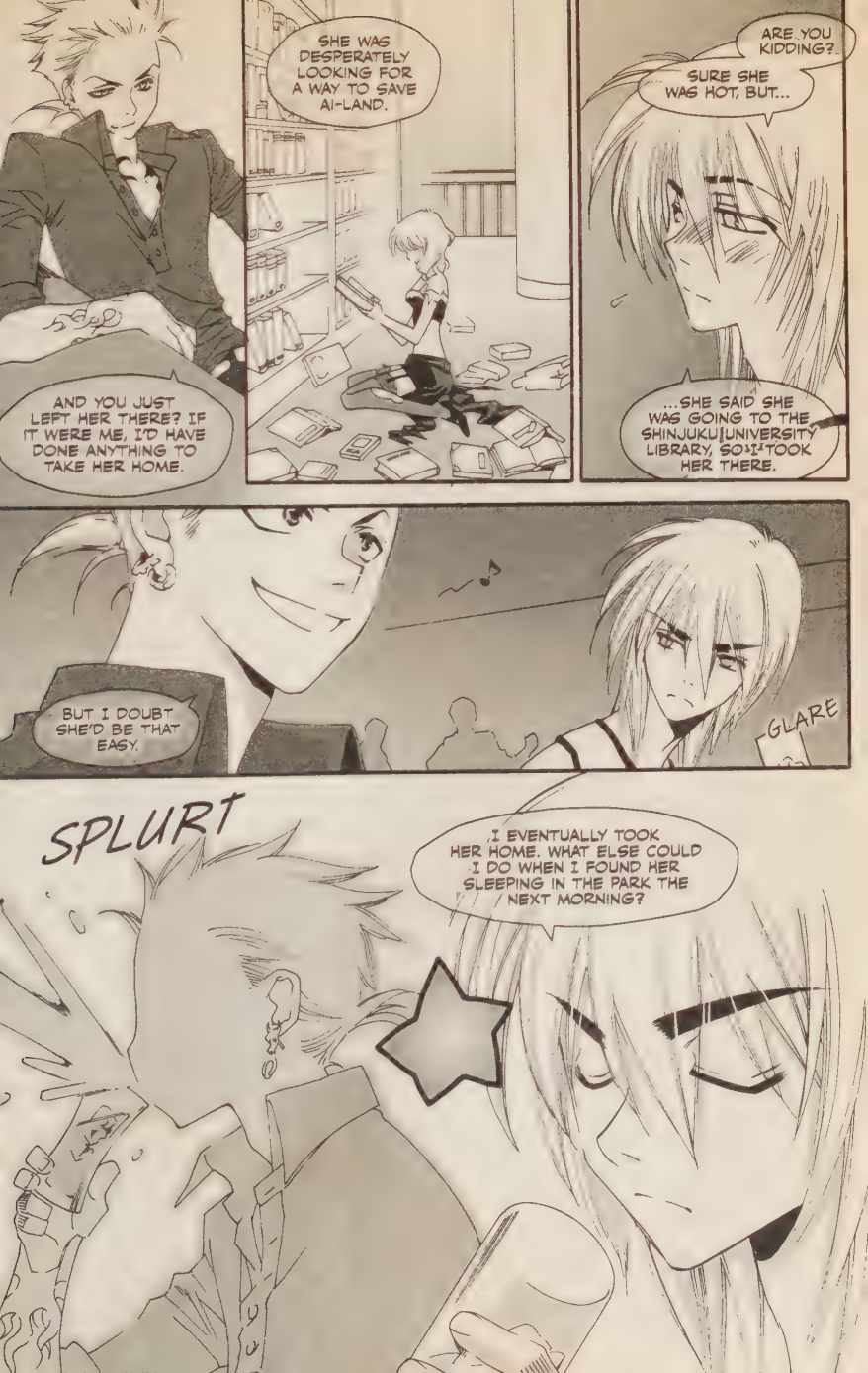
A GENIUS ARTIST OF UNPARALLELED TALENT...
...PRINCESS A!
FLASH
H.T.A. Presents
HONORED GUESTS, I'M PROUD TO PRESENT THE WORLD FAMOUS ROCK DIVA...
WOOOOT!
WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, PLEASE ENJOY THE VIDEO!

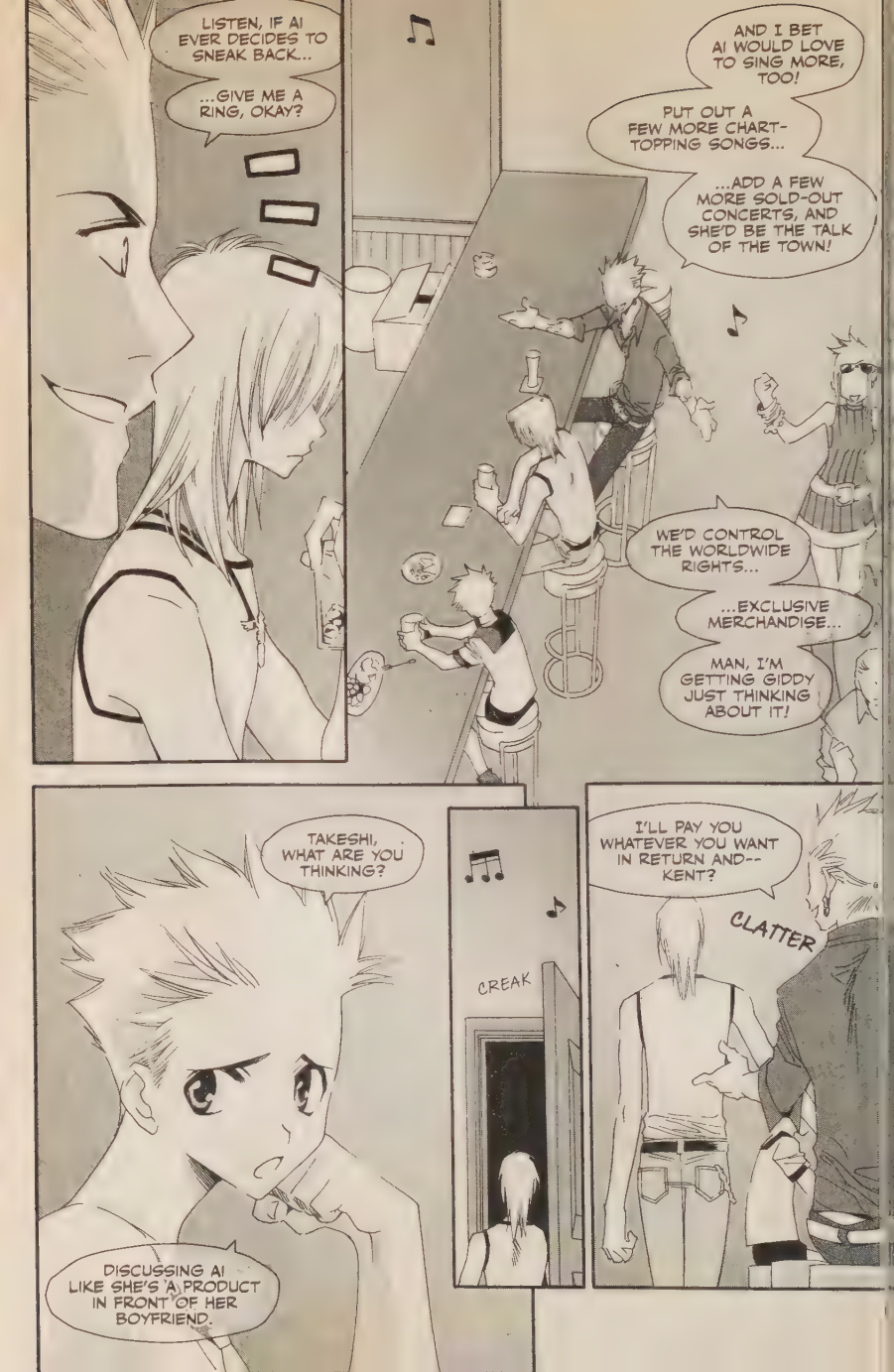
GAWD, I FEEL LIKE A REAL CELEBRITY!
YOU GOT THAT RIGHT.
I WONDER IF THIS IS WHAT AI'S CASTLE IS LIKE ON AI-LAND.
FOOM


THAT WAS AI.
BUT WHEN I TRIED TO GIVE HER BACK THIS HEART-SHAPED BOX SHE HAD, THE GIRL SCREAMED, "DON'T TOUCH IT!" AT ME.
SOUNDS LIKE HER.
I NEVER SUSPECTED SHE WAS ACTUALLY A PRINCESS FROM ANOTHER LAND.
WELL, DUH.
SO, THEN YOU-TOOK-HER-BACK-HOME WITH YOU?
SMIRK SMIRK
IT'S NOT RARE TO FIND DRUNK GIRLS STUMBLING AROUND SHINJUKU...
...SO I THOUGHT SHE WAS JUST ANOTHER ONE OF THEM.

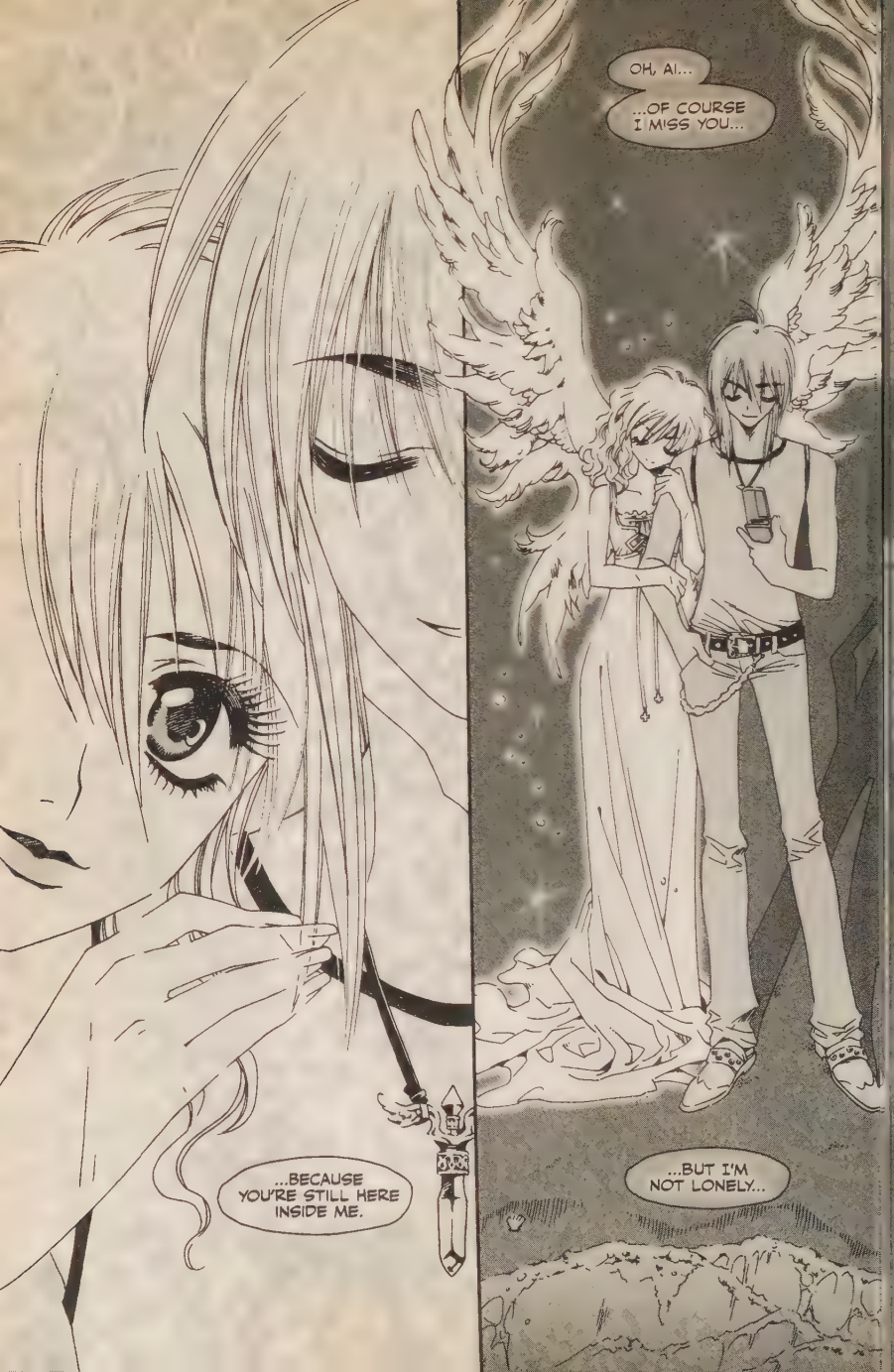
HOW YOU FIRST MET AI?
YOU MIND TELLING ME HOW IT STARTED?
GIVE ME THAT BACK!
GRAB
GRAB
IT WAS A LATE NIGHT IN SHINJUKU.
THAT'S WHEN I HAPPENED TO RUN ACROSS SOME GIRL YELLING.
WHAT THE--?!
SOME PUNK THIEF WAS COMING MY WAY, SO I TACKLED HIM.
NICE MOVE.


AH HA! SO YOU FIGURED YOU HAD TO DO IT, 'CUZ YOU COULDN'T TRUST ANY-ONE ELSE.
MAYBE I SHOULD'VE GONE TO THE POLICE ABOUT IT, BUT...
...IT WAS STILL COLD, AND SHE WAS BARELY WEARING ANY-THING, SO--
...AND HAVE A STRONG PERSONALITY ARE USUALLY HARD TO DEAL WITH.
BUT...
GIRLS WHO WEAR SEX CLOTHES LIKE HERS...
IT LOOKED LIKE SHE WAS DEALING WITH SOMETHING SERIOUS...
...AND THAT'S WHY...
AND I RESPECT A GIRL WHO STANDS UP FOR HERSELF
...THE SPARKLE IN HER EYES SHOWED SH WAS COMPLETEL DIFFERENT.


AND YOU JUST LEFT HER THERE? IF IT WERE ME, I'D HAVE DONE ANYTHING TO TAKE HER HOME.
SHE WAS DESPERATELY LOOKING FOR A WAY TO SAVE AI-LAND.
ARE YOU KIDDING?.
SURE SHE WAS HOT, BUT...
...SHE SAID SHE WAS GOING TO THE SHINJUKU UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, SO I TOOK HER THERE.
BUT I DOUBT SHE'D BE THAT EASY.
GLARE
SPLURT
I EVENTUALLY TOOK HER HOME. WHAT ELSE COULD I DO WHEN I FOUND HER SLEEPING IN THE PARK THE NEXT MORNING?

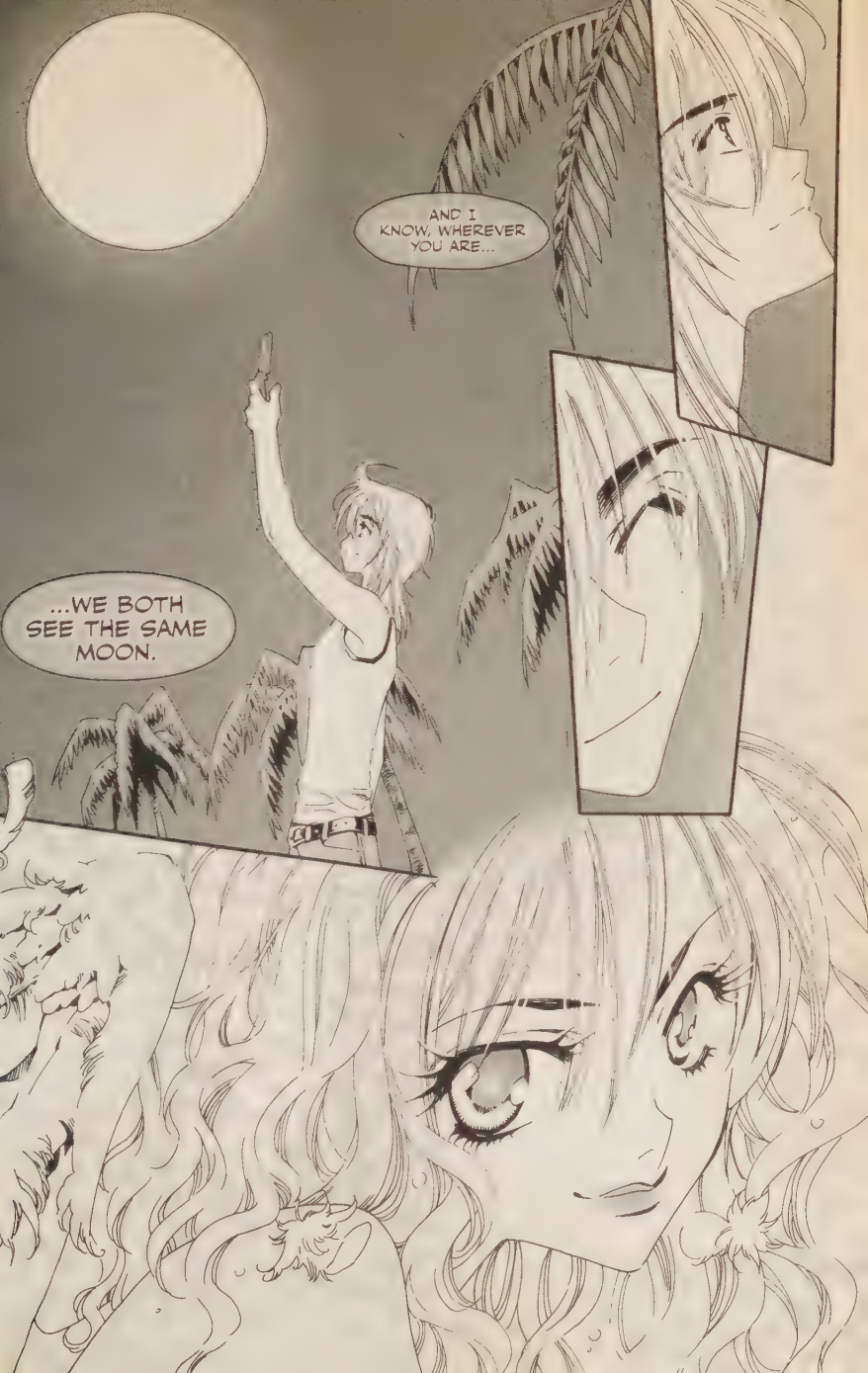

LISTEN, IF AI EVER DECIDES TO SNEAK BACK...
...GIVE ME A RING, OKAY?
AND I BET AI WOULD LOVE TO SING MORE, TOO!
PUT OUT A FEW MORE CHART-TOPPING SONGS...
...ADD A FEW MORE SOLD-OUT CONCERTS, AND SHE'D BE THE TALK OF THE TOWN!
WE'D CONTROL THE WORLDWIDE RIGHTS...
...EXCLUSIVE MERCHANDISE...
MAN, I'M GETTING GIDDY JUST THINKING ABOUT IT!
TAKESHI, WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?
DISCUSSING AI LIKE SHE'S A PRODUCT IN FRONT OF HER BOYFRIEND.
CREAK
I'LL PAY YOU WHATEVER YOU WANT IN RETURN AND--
KENT?
CLATTER

...I WANTED TO HELP HER.
I'M SURE YOU MISS HER, TOO, DON'T YOU, KENT?
WHADDAYA THINK SHE'S DOING NOW?
OUR TIME TOGETHER WAS SHORT, BUT I'D LOVE FOR HER TO COME BACK AGAIN.
CLINK


OH, AI...
...OF COURSE I MISS YOU...
...BUT I'M NOT LONELY...
...BECAUSE YOU'RE STILL HERE INSIDE ME.

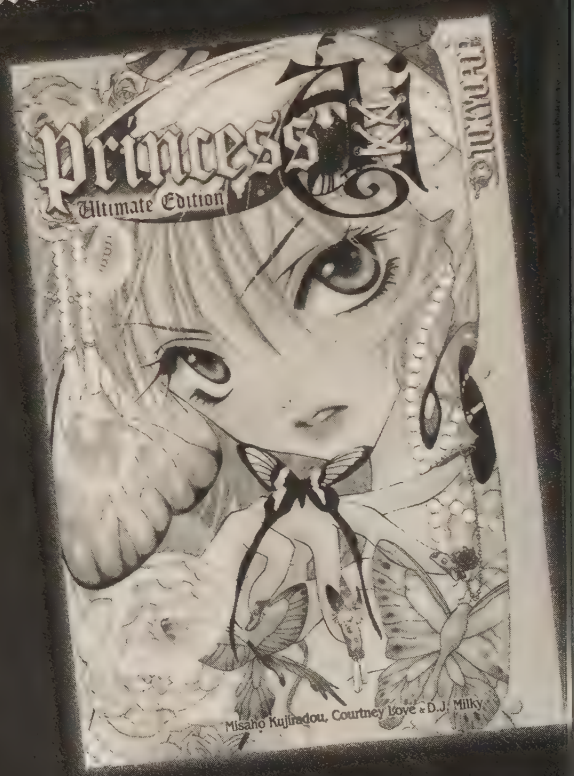
FRUSH
FRUSH
IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T LIKE TALKING ABOUT "PRINCESS AI."
FLIK
IT'S AN HONOR TO HAVE HER LOVED BY PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD...
...BUT I'M PROUD TO HAVE AN IMAGE OF HER THAT ONLY I KNOW.

THE END


AND I KNOW, WHEREVER YOU ARE...
...WE BOTH SEE THE SAME MOON.

Princess

Don't Miss Out
on Your Share of Love & Chaos



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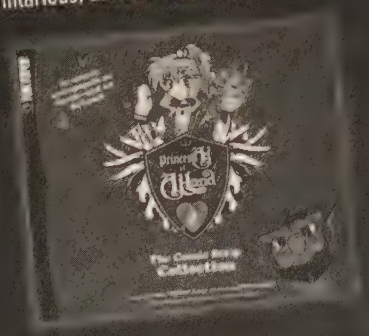

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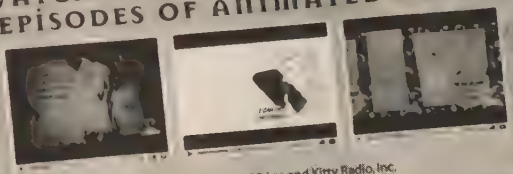

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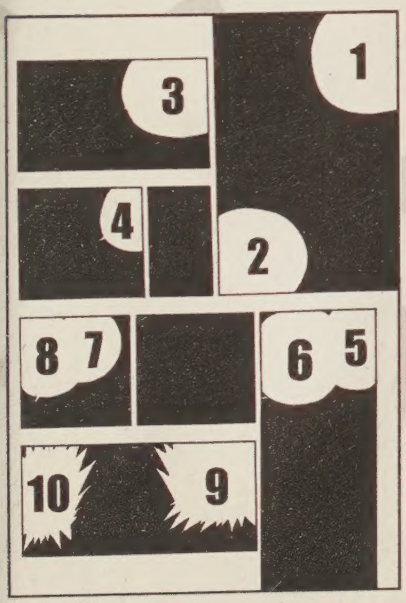
This book is printed "manga style," in the authentic Japanese right to left format. Since none of the artwork has been flipped or altered, readers get to experience the story just as the creator intended. You've been asking for it, so TOKYOPOP® delivered: authentic, hot-off-the-press, and far more fun!



DIRECTIONS

If this is your first time reading manga-style, here's a quick guide to help you understand how it works.

It's easy... just start in the top right panel and follow the numbers. Have fun, and look for more 100% authentic manga from TOKYOPOP®!

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